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Exploring the Dynamics of Short-Format Videos on Social Media
Platforms on Brand Perception and Brand Loyalty.

by

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Abstract

- Title:** Exploring the Dynamics of Short-Format Videos on Social Media Platforms
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- Keywords:** Semiotics, Short Format Videos, Brand Perceptions, Brand Loyalty, Semiotics, Perfume Marketing.
- Purpose:** The purpose is to explore how consumers understand semiotics in short format videos and its influence on brand perception and brand loyalty.
- Methodology:** A qualitative study using an interpretivist and constructionist view with an abductive reasoning method was used to analyse the empirical findings. The purpose is exemplified in the context of perfumes.
- Theoretical Perspective:** Gratification Niches Theory proposed by Scherr & Wang (2021), and Brand Relationship Theory by Fournier (1998) were used to study the phenomenon.
- Empirical Data:** Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted.
- Conclusions:** The findings showed that innovative communication methods in short format videos positively influenced brand perception of perfume brands. User-generated content (UGC) added authenticity to these semiotic cues, reflecting real-life experiences and opinions, and thus, significantly influenced consumer behaviour.

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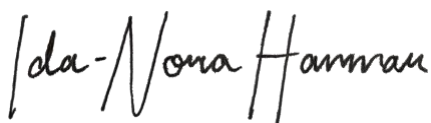
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1 Introduction

The first chapter presents the background which provides context on the topical areas the thesis is grounded in, specifically short-format videos, social media, consumer behaviour and semiotics. The following section presents the problematization of the topic, then the aim and objectives are presented, delineating the overarching ambition of the thesis. In the following section the research purpose and question are provided. Delimitations are articulated to define the scope and boundaries of the study. The final section of this chapter is concluded with an outline that the thesis will follow.

1.1 Background

The digital era marked a significant shift in communication, with information and its accessibility becoming critical resources for strategic development (Stocchetti, 2014). Technological innovations in both hard- and software paved the way for the development of new modes of communication, arguably obliterating the relevance of traditional communication modes like radio and print newspapers (Al-Quran, 2022). As such, a new avenue for marketers to reach current and prospective customers, colloquially known as digital marketing, emerged. Elder & Krishna (2022) stated that 28% of the global advertising spend was in television advertisements, while more than 51% was online. Innovation in mixed media virtual communication software manufactured an opportune time for marketers to explore how they might capitalize on social media. Social media are digital software platforms accessible on digital devices used to share, create, and interact virtually (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The current global user base of social media is 4.9 billion, with estimates reaching 5.85 billion by 2027 (Thakur, 2023).

In the past decade, short-format videos (SFV) on social media have grown to be a popular medium for netizens to communicate virtually (Kaye et al., 2022). Shao et al. (2023, p.135) hypothesise that these short videos have gained popularity because “*the rapid pace of modern life may partly cause the increasing popularity of short videos. As the pace of life accelerates, people’s leisure time becomes fragmented*”. The short-format videos, characterized by their

brevity and visual appeal (Kaye et al., 2022; Scherr & Wang, 2021), have emerged as a dominant communication medium, affording brands and content creators a new way to reach and engage with their audiences (Shao et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2024). Kaye et al. (2022) defined them by four distinct traits; less than 60 seconds, require one action (e.g. tap, swipe) to see the next video, integrated content production features, and easily replicable content (e.g. dance trends). Short-format videos were globally popularized in 2016 with the launch of the social media platform ByteDance's TikTok (Kaye et al., 2021; Louis & Nah, 2023). The immense success of the format is due to its media rich nature, as they are exceptionally effective at disseminating information (Chen et al., 2022; Daft & Lengel, 1986). The seemingly unprecedented success of this media-rich information vehicle has led social media platforms other than TikTok to adopt the short-format video medium, such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Snapchat Stories. Each social media employs a different content recommendation algorithm, which varies in delivering engaging UGC and branded content to the consumer (Guinaudeau et al., 2022; Wang, 2022).

Semiotics, the science of signs, is used interdisciplinary to understand the meaning of signs, symbols, and/or icons (Kaye et al., 2022). Its name stems from the Greek word "semiosis", meaning "*the process of making meaning*" (Chandler, 2022, p.33). Semiotics are representations of ideas in objects that produce meaning beyond the literal properties of an object. For example, a flag decorated with symbols and colours arranged through intentional composition prescribes the flag an identity belonging to a particular country. The sum features of the object now hold more meaning than the object itself. In the context of market communication, semiotics is used to draw from a set of common signs and symbols to articulate meaning to the consumer through advertisements, signage, or even product packaging (Zakia & Nadin, 1987). Semiotics are inherently embedded in advertisement and brand communication, including on social media channels as short-format videos (Faizan, 2019). Consumers can form attachments to semiotic brand objects, and therefore affects the loyalty consumers feel towards brands (Chen, 2023).

This evolution of short-format videos on social media platforms has significantly transformed brands' marketing strategies, emphasizing the value of consumers' virtual engagement (e.g. liking, commenting, sharing, saving) (Youn et al., 2024). User Generated Content (UGC) and brands' short-format videos, assume a central role in shaping consumer perceptions of product brands (Kaye et al., 2022; Rodgers & Thorson, 2019). Through UGC, users actively participate

in the creation and dissemination of content, thereby appropriating brands semiotic objects and infusing their personal interpretations and opinions into the brand's narrative (Bobrie, 2018; Sykora et al., 2023). Brand's content, on the other hand, are curated premeditated messages that strategically employ semiotic cues such as visuals, text, and audio to evoke desired associations and emotions (Faizan, 2019). Understanding how consumers perceive and decode semiotic objects in short-format videos about perfumes is essential for brands seeking to create substantive consumer connections and improve brand loyalty in an increasingly competitive landscape.

1.2 Problematization

Marketers are faced with the task of maximizing impressions and engagement through digital marketing channels, and failing at this has now become a criterion for a firm's success (Cornelissen, 2007; Karjaluoto et al., 2015). With the rise of SFVs as a popular type of medium (Chen et al., 2023; Jingga et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2024), brands are increasingly turning to social media platforms to improve brand perceptions and increase brand loyalty (Chen, 2023; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2023). SFVs on social media are shared at rapid rates and frequently high in engagement (Chen et al., 2023), thereby offering a remarkable opportunity for brands to reach and engage with their target demographic (Ganev, 2023; Yin et al., 2024). However, the impact of how the semiotic cues in SFVs affect consumer's brand perception and brand loyalty remains a topic of exploration (Dong et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2019). Despite the adoption of SFV in digital marketing, there is a lack of scholastic understanding of how these information-dense bite-sized snippets of content influence consumer attitudes and behaviours toward brands (Yin et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2023).

The fleeting nature of SFV, characterised by their brevity, media richness, and rapid consumption (Kaye et al., 2022; Qin et al., 2022), raises questions about its lasting impact on consumer perceptions (Yin et al., 2024; Park et al., 2020). As consumers increasingly contribute to the creation and distribution of content on social media platforms (Chen et al., 2022; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2023), the boundaries between organic (UGC) and branded content blur, challenging traditional conventions of brand communication and consumer engagement. Understanding how UGC/content influences consumer loyalty towards

brands featured in short videos is essential for brands aiming to harness or control the power of user-generated content as a marketing tool.

The lack of comprehensive research examining the multifaceted influence of short-format videos on brand perception and loyalty represents a critical gap in the literature. Previous research on short format video-related studies focuses on quantitative metrics (Chen et al., 2022; Qin et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2023; Yang & Lee, 2022; Yin et al., 2024), neglecting the qualitative aspect of consumer perceptions (Apasrawirote et al., 2022). Additionally, purchase intention and behaviour (Yin et al., 2024), as well as application addiction (Chen et al., 2022; Qin et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2023), in short-format video platforms has been widely explored in previous studies (Li et al., 2023). Examining the impact of SFV on brand awareness and engagement, lacks a realisation of brand loyalty not only encompassing repeat purchase behaviour but also a deeper emotional commitment to the brand (Yang & Lee, 2022; Xiao et al., 2023). Without a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying consumer responses to branded content in short videos, marketers risk misjudging the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategies and failing to capitalise on the immense potential of short videos as a vehicle for brand recognition and consumer engagement (Wang et al., 2023). Additionally, Yang & Lee (2022) advocate for further investigation into customer loyalty. Thus, there is a pressing need for qualitative research that examines the nuanced dynamics of short-format videos on social media platforms and their implications for brand-consumer relationships (Xiao et al., 2023). Bobrie (2018) voices a dire need for more literature into the concrete figurative dimensions of branding, as it has been neglected in the field of branding thus far. Emphasizing the value and precision of the heuristic tool that is visual semiotics in distinguishing categories and characteristics of products. In addition, Faizan (2019) notes the opportunity to investigate the role of semiotics in advertising by way of psychographic segmentation such as consumer values and attitudes.

Short-format video platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, are gaining significant traction as effective tools for brand promotion (Shen & Bissell, 2013; Wang et al., 2023). SFV is a fitting medium to showcase personality, mood, and stories behind people, brands, and products. Since perfumes are unique products that rely heavily on sensory experiences, such as smell and emotion, hence it's challenges of communicating the essence of perfumes through traditional advertising (Paris et al., 2020). This further makes advertising of perfume an intriguing avenue for exploration through short format videos. Thus, studying the impact of semiotics in short

format videos allows researchers to stay abreast of emerging trends and identify innovative approaches to engage consumers in the constant changing landscape of social media. Understanding how consumers understand semiotic cues in short-format videos offer brands rich opportunities to optimize their content creation, distribution, and engagement strategies to drive brand loyalty, and ultimately, sales.

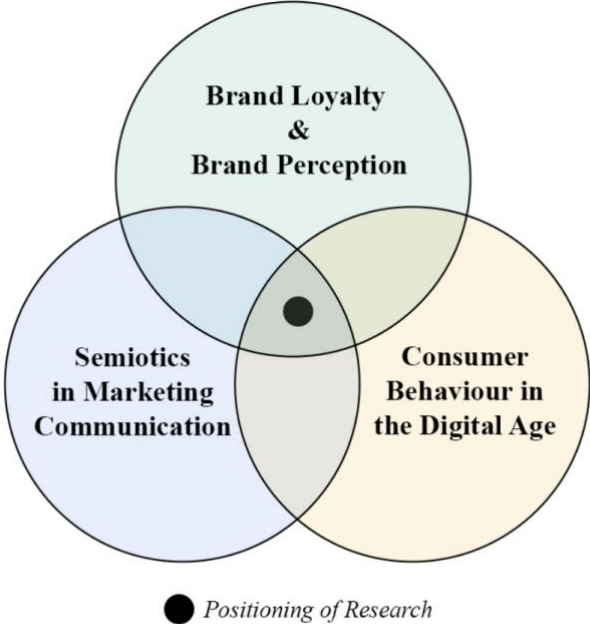


Figure 1: Venn-diagram of Positioning

1.3 Aim and Objectives

This study aims to explore the complex relationship between consumer’s interpretation of semiotics and brand perceptions and loyalty, specifically illustrated through the perfume industry. Hence, exploring how consumer’s understanding of semiotics in short-format videos influence brand perceptions and loyalty.

Considering the aim of the study, the research strives to analyse the semiotic elements present in short-format videos related to perfume brands on social media platforms, putting emphasis on consumers perceptions of the semiotic aspects. The objective of the study is to unearth insights that not only inform marketing strategies but also contribute to the wider discourse on

brand perception and loyalty in the continuously evolving digital marketing sphere, primarily in short-format videos. These objectives collectively contribute to advancing scholarly understanding of the role of semiotics in shaping consumer behaviour and brand relationships, particularly in social media marketing and engagement.

1.4 Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of the research is to investigate consumers understanding of semiotics in short-format videos and how these interpretations impact their brand perceptions and loyalty. This is specifically illustrated within the context of the perfume industry. Moreover, the study endeavours to uncover the nuanced meanings and interpretations consumers attach to brands, focusing on comprehending how SFVs contribute to shaping these perceptions. Through comprehensive analysis of the semiotic elements present in content disseminated across SFV platforms, this research aims to discern the manner in which these cues impact consumer attitudes and behaviours, exemplified with perfume brands. Thus, the following research question was determined:

How do consumer interpretations of semiotics in short-format videos influence brand perceptions and loyalty?

1.5 Delimitations

The study has a number of constraints. Firstly, the study focusses solely on the interpretation of semiotics within short-format videos from the perspective of consumers. It will not pursue the semiotic analysis conducted by researchers or marketers since the aim is to understand semiotics through the lens of consumers' perceptions. Secondly, the research will be limited to short-format videos on selected social media platforms, such as Instagram Reels and TikTok. It will not encompass other platforms outside of this scope, thus, aiming to maintain specificity and depth in exploring the topic. Thirdly, another delimitation concerns the chosen industry of the study, perfumes, as opposed to other industries or product categories. This industry is chosen to demonstrate the consumer's understanding of semiotics in SFVs and the impact on brand perception and loyalty. Lastly, it is of utmost importance to recognize that the analysis

will be conducted based on short-format videos available within a specific timeframe determined by the study period. Any changes in consumer behaviour or semiotic trends occurring outside this timeframe will not be captured. This is to maintain integrity and relevance of the study, although it may limit the scope of the findings to a particular period, it guarantees that the analysis remains current and reflective of the context under investigation.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The research paper is outlined by the subsequent chapters: introduction, literature and theoretical review, method and methodology, empirical findings and analysis, discussion, and lastly conclusion. This is to enhance the reader's understanding and provide a seamless navigation through the study. In the first chapter of the study, an overview of background and problem delineation is presented, purposed to provide the reader an understanding of the study's objective. The literature and theoretical review aim to comprehend the subject of the paper by displaying past research. The fundamental concepts and theories discussed are Gratification niches, Brand-Relationship Quality construct, and Semiotics. The following chapter, method and methodology, argue for the chosen approach to address the research question. Thus, the qualitative research is based on semi-structured interviews with nine participants to explore how consumers understand semiotics in short-format videos and how these interpretations impact their brand perceptions and loyalty. Furthermore, exploring this topic in the context of the perfume industry is introduced, wherein a justification for choosing this industry is detailed in the methodology. The empirical findings are discussed and connected to themes, which are: the gratification niches trendiness and novelty, the six-faceted brand-relationship quality construct delving into love and passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, and brand relationship quality, and lastly, semiotics. The analysis entails multiple quotes from the participants, including interpretations of how these can be perceived and understood. Consequently, the discussion connects previous research and theoretical background to the empirical findings and analysis, further determining the contributions and implications of the study. Lastly, the conclusion clarifies the study's outcome and suggestions for further research.

2 Literature and Theoretical Review

The Literature and Theoretical Review chapter provides an overview of the foundational literature and theoretical framework relevant to the topic. The literature review identifies the key areas of relevance; consumer behaviour in the digital age, marketing communication, semiotics, brand perception and brand loyalty, user-generated content, short-format videos on social media platforms, and the cosmetics and personal care. Additionally, a theoretical review is presented which includes Gratification Niches and Brand-Relationship Theory. The insight from the literature includes relevant studies which contributes to the theoretical foundation for studying consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards perfume short-format videos.

In conducting the literature review for this research paper, we adhered to thorough criteria, focusing on peer-reviewed papers published no earlier than 2014. This constraint was imposed to prioritize contemporary insights into the dynamic between semiotics in SFVs and brand perceptions and brand loyalty. Nevertheless, exceptions were made when original sources were indispensable for understanding elementary concepts and historical underpinnings contributing to contemporary discourse. Moreover, allowances were extended for articles discovered via citation chaining, thereby enriching the breadth and depth of the literature reviewed.

A narrative approach to reviewing the literature offered a more expansive overview of existing research and allowing for greater flexibility in refining the scope of the subject as the paper progressed (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This method was considered appropriate for the research approach, as outlined in the forthcoming Method and Methodology chapter, aligning effectively with the epistemological nature of the study.

The literature search utilized LUBsearch and Google Scholar, using keywords such as 'Short-format videos', 'Consumer Brand Perceptions', 'Brand loyalty', 'Marketing Communication', 'Perfume Marketing', 'Perfume AND Branding', 'Cosmetics AND Perfume Industry', 'Marketing Scents', 'Brand Communities Online', and 'Semiotics' to retrieve relevant scholarly articles. Subsequently, a careful selection process was undertaken, wherein articles were precisely assessed based on their abstracts, discussions, and prospectors for further research.

The conclusion of this methodical procedure resulted in the identification of 59 articles deemed relevant for inclusion in the literature and theoretical review. These selected readings afforded insights into nine distinct facets, delineating aspects such as: 1) Consumer Behaviour in the Digital Age, 2) Marketing Communication, 3) Semiotics, 4) Brand Perception and Brand Loyalty, 5) User-Generated Content, 6) Short-Format Videos on Social Media Platforms, 7) The Cosmetics and Personal Care Industry, 8) Gratification Niches, and 9) Brand Relationship Theory.

2.1.1 Consumer Behaviour in the Digital Age

Consumer Behaviour in the digital age has undergone metamorphosis due to technological advancements which have evolved content consumption habits in users, and impacted influence of social media platforms (Al-Quran, 2022; Stocchetti, 2014). This social media paradigm shift provides users an avenue for increased connectivity, accessibility to information, and empowerment of consumers (Kaye et al., 2021, 2022; Thakur, 2023). Thus, changes in consumer preferences, expectations, and behaviours, necessitating a deeper understanding of the digital consumer landscape.

Consumers are increasingly turning to virtual platforms such as social media, streaming services, and e-commerce websites to satisfy their entertainment, information-seeking, and shopping needs (Scherr & Wang, 2021; Yin et al., 2024). The adoption of digital content consumption has changed user engagement preferences, with short-form videos, visual content, and interactive media gaining prominence as popular mediums (Yang & Lee, 2022). Social media platforms allow consumers to seek product recommendations, reviews, compare prices, and make purchases directly within the platforms, blurring the lines between socialising and shopping (Yang & Lee, 2022; Yin et al., 2024). Moreover, content creators wield considerable influence over consumer perceptions and preferences, serving as trusted sources of information and product endorsements.

2.1.2 Marketing Communication

Communication involves transmitting information and meaning through speech, text, visual imagery, or movement (Gordon, 2024). The Western definition of communication assumes that

communication is culturally mediated as communication is dependent on agreed conventions between the ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ (Mooij, 2022). Western foundational literature on communication relies on the assumption that all communication is inherently persuasive (Van Ruler, 2018). This view of communication anchors itself in Aristotle’s two millennia old Rhetoric, which presents three means of persuasion; logos (the argument itself), ethos (the character of the speaker) and pathos (the emotional state of the receiver) (Rapp, 2023; Van Ruler, 2018). Rhetoric is used by marketers by anticipating the audience’s probable reaction to craft a medium that entices consumers by conveying aspects of the firm, brand, or product (Mooij, 2022). Often these type of communicative marketing endeavours manifest as advertisements. According to Richards & Curran, (2002, p. 64) “*Advertising is a paid nonpersonal communication from an identified sponsor, using mass media to persuade or influence an audience,*”. Marketers employ a variety of methods, and strategies to optimise creative, informative, and captivating communication to appeal to, and engage with consumers with the ultimate goal of increasing sales (Mooij, 2022; Roper & Fill, 2012). One such type of communication styles is direct, or indirect communication. Direct is text based, explicit, informative, and structured whilst indirect is visual, aesthetic, metaphoric, and dramatic. These two communication styles are most effective with compatible cultures. Individualistic cultures (e.g. America, England) tend to use low-context communication (the ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ don’t need to ‘read between the lines’) and therefore use a direct style of communication. The opposite is true for Collectivist cultures (e.g. Japan, China) who employ high-context communication and are more used to decoding indirect communication. An additional measure in communication, particularly in marketing is the likability of an advertisement. Mooji (2022) proposes that the degree of an ad should be meaningful, does not rub the wrong way, warm, pleasing the mind, and is socially appropriate are all important aspects in an advertisement’s likeability. A new consideration for marketers is the popularity of short-format videos as an a medium for advertising, or commercials (Wang et al., 2023). This is largely due to the versatility of the variations of content features available for brands to employ in viral video advertising, particularly on TikTok.

2.1.3 Semiotics

Semiotics is a perspective in which to view and appreciate reality, it is best demonstrated with the cultural monolith, René Magritte’s (1929) *The Treachery of Images*, depicted in his painting is a pipe and below it is the text “*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*” (This is not a pipe). Guzelian’s (2006)

interpretation is that Magritte intended to remind viewers *“that his representation—oil smeared on parchment—is not a pipe. It is a symbol... Magritte’s intent is for his audience to perceive semiotics,”*. Philosophers have contemplated about how the meanings of symbols and signs are derived dating back to medieval times (Chandler, 2022). The contemporary study of semiotics is dedicated to the pursuit of understanding how meanings are prescribed and constructed between those with a shared frame of reference (Chandler, 2022). In academia the semiotic perspective is frequently used by scholars to analyse and decode advertisements unveiling coded information the marketers aimed to transmit. This decoding is however not exclusive to researchers but (sub)consciously used by consumers as well. Consumers are at liberty to interpret semiotics of the branded and advertised commodities they are exposed to by reading between the lines or decoding symbols and icons by drawing from their existing knowledge. This process is a variation in marketing communication as the information transfer between brand, and consumer occurs through semiotically coded information. Bernhard Kettermann, (2013) contends that persons do not consume commodities, they consume the meaning of the product, linking semiotics in advertising, and marketing communication. The managerial implications of employing semiotics in advertising is that it acts the mediating force between the consumer relationship to, and perception of the commodity.

Charles Sanders Peirce’s Peircean Sign Relations (Peirce & Hoopes, 1991), influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure’s (Chandler, 2022; Holdcroft, 1991) theories of signs, delineates the evolutionary trajectory of individuals’ perceptions into conceptual frameworks across three types of relationships based on the knowledge needed for the sign to be understood. One must have one or more of either representational or situation knowledge to derive meaning from the sign relations. Representational knowledge has to do with the interpreter having previous understanding of shared conventions. Situational knowledge meaning that the interpreter uses their understanding of real-world objects or experiences to make inferences.

Peircean’s three Sign Relation are often ranked from more conventional to less conventional representations. Symbolic signs are *“based on a relationship that is fundamentally unmotivated, arbitrary, or purely conventional – so that it must be agreed upon and learned”* (e.g. flags, words, numbers) and require representational knowledge and are therefore conventional (Chandler, 2022, p.42). The iconic sign relation is *“based on perceived resemblance or imitation (involving some recognizably similar quality, such as appearance, sound, feeling, taste, or smell)”* (Chandler, 2022, p. 43). The icon would be a cartoon, a portrait,

or a metaphor which require both representational and situational knowledge to be understood as it is a matter of comprehended similarity. Finally, the indexical sign relation is “*based on direct connection (physical or causal). This link can be observed or inferred*” (e.g. smoke, pulse rate, a phone ringing) and are derived for situational knowledge obtained from personal encounters and observations (Chandler, 2022, p.43).

Table 1: Types of Knowledge needed for interpreting sign relations (Chandler, 2022)

Sign Relations	Based on perceived similarity	Forms of knowledge needed	
		Representational Knowledge	Situational Knowledge
<i>Symbolic</i>	Convention	Interpreters need to have learned the relevant forms and conventions	
<i>Icon</i>	Similarity		Interpreters can infer likely meanings on the basis of analogous real-world situations and objects
<i>Indexical</i>	Connection		

In this paper Peircean Sign Relations is adopted to understand how consumers analyse and interpret signs and symbols in short-format video content, exemplifying it through the perfume industry. This framework emphasizes individual cognitive processes and the formation of meanings. The idea of utilising Peircean Sign Relations is to capture the consumers perceptions identify the different sign elements (icons, indexes, and symbols) and explore how these elements contribute to the brand perception and loyalty, aiming to answer the research question. The fast-paced nature of these platforms may require marketers to use conventional and compelling signs to effectively capture viewers’ attention and transmit information efficiently (Faizan, 2019).

2.1.4 Brand Perception and Brand Loyalty

The scholastic investigation of the interplay between the agentic actors who host, produce, or engage with short-form videos suggests that these relationships influence brand perception and brand loyalty. Brand perception, a parallel concept to brand image and brand reputation, is

independently formed by internal and external stakeholders (Roper & Fill, 2012). Brand perception matters because it influences brand loyalty, it is the manifested relationship between the brand and the consumer. On either end of the positive-negative brand perception scale, those who hold the brand in high regard are more likely to graduate from a nondescript customer to a loyal one, and the consequence of poor brand perception would be ‘terrorists’ who actively seek to prevent success and development of the brand. Bromley (2000) proposes that there are three ways consumers acquire information that support how they make a judgement about the brand, from the brand itself in a direct interaction, second hand from a knowledgeable third party or utilising the individual knowledge they acquire. Building and maintaining a positive and profitable brand perception in consumers is more challenging than ever with the 24-hour news cycle and the wildfire-like impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Babić Rosario et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2023). Electronic word of mouth is defined by Babić Rosario et al., (2020, p.422) as a “*statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet*”. The digital age that is seemingly perpetually reliant on social media SFV content from all three of Bromley’s informational input complicates the degree of control a brand has on a consumer’s perception (Roper & Fill, 2012). The second of Bromley’s (2000) consumer information acquisition methods, second hand knowledge from a knowledgeable third-party, appears to be stronger than ever on social networking sites (SNS) through eWOM. The power of eWOM on consumer perception of brands is that consumers evaluate other consumers shared opinions and experiences to inform their consumption habit and has been found to reduce uncertainty in consumers and aids them in expectation management (Babić Rosario et al., 2020).

Knoll’s (2016) investigation into advertising on social media platforms found that users were accepting of advertisements on the platform, but the advertisements were untrustworthy, irrelevant, and lacked credibility. However, user attitudes were more positive when the advertisements were informative or entertaining, where the latter was four times stronger in influencing positive attitudes than the former.

Sensory branding, meaning the visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory stimuli to create memorable brand experiences for consumers, can improve brand loyalty due to the intensity as it is one of the strongest dimensions of experience for humans (Berman et al., 2023; Hulten, 2017). Brand loyalty according to Berman et al., (2023) refers to the degree of attachment that a customer feels towards a brand and is therefore very important for brands as

it is often used as an important measure of the success of the brand's marketing strategy. Brand loyalty is also influenced by factors such as price and quality. Mascarenhas et al., (2006) suggests that the strength of sensory stimuli may be linked to the long-lasting association created for a consumer to a brand (Berman et al., 2023).

Hulten (2017) proposes that sensory branding affects emotion and that it is therefore beneficial for brands to employ such branding techniques as it attracts consumers and improves brand loyalty. Furthermore, emotive connections to sensory branding are uniquely tied to cultural dimensions, such as how Chinese people assess a brand name on how visually attractive it is, whilst English consumers assess brand names on how it sounds (Hulten, 2017). Understanding how emotive responses and cultural dimensions effect brand loyalty in sensory branding are critical to unearth to thoroughly investigate in consumers appraise short-format video content about products. Additionally brand loyalty is effected by hedonic brand images which increases brand attachment in consumers, whilst a functional brand image increases brand trust (Diallo et al., 2020). Hedonic brand images are reliant on sensory attributes and are associated with emotional gratification.

2.1.5 User-Generated Content

Content is characterised by users of a platform contributing to the platform by publishing their own unique content (Arnhold, 2010). UGC in the marketing and branding context often implies content centred on utilising, and/or reviewing a product or service. The act of producing UGC encourages, and liberates consumers in expressively sharing their anecdotal, or 'unbiased' opinions and experiences of a brand and its offerings. UGC, especially in the form of short-format videos, has garnered significant scholarly attention due to its transformative impact on media consumption patterns and production practices. Scholars, like Arnhold (2010), have highlighted UGC's role in democratising content creation, enabling individuals to participate in media production and its subsequent distribution processes. According to Halim (2023), brands employing UGC appear to be more trustworthy and authentic by leveraging authentic user experiences and endorsements. Halim (2023) goes on to state that using a celebrity to advertise the brand is less effective than utilising UGC.

Social media platforms which use sophisticated content recommendation algorithms like TikTok have seen immense popularity from users due to co-creation and interaction between

content creators and brands (Wang, 2022). The collaboration between brand to user, or user to brand can cause video virality, through for example challenges, or topic participation. Brands leveraging of the power of UGC can lead to viral marketing on social media platforms which can strengthen users' sense of involvement in brands communications. The Social media influencers have grown significantly over recent years, where these individuals create content often in exchange for financial compensation (Aliyev, 2021; Wang et al., 2023). These influencers are content creators who have a significant community due to their personal brand. Balaban and Racz (2020) concluded in their study that including social media influencer advertising in the brand's marketing plan brings additional plus, both in terms of the user's attitude towards the brand and the brand recall. Thus, promoting a product through people known and admired by content consumers can add value to the brand. However, it is important to choose an appropriate influence in terms of matching the brand.

2.1.6 Short-Format Videos on Social Media Platforms

The different social media platforms today represent a diverse ecosystem, each offering unique features and functionalities tailored to the preferences and behaviours of their respective user bases (Dewi, 2021). These platforms have reshaped the landscape of social media content creation and consumption, empowering users to express themselves creatively and engage with content in innovative ways. As short-format videos continue to successfully proliferate across social media platforms and increase user engagement, several dominant social networks have adopted it in their own platforms (Ganev, 2023).

Snapchat, launched in 2011, introduced the concept of short-lived messaging and has since evolved into a versatile platform for multimedia sharing. Its real-time, authentic communications, highlighted by disappearing photos and videos, remains central to its appeal (Meng & Leung, 2021). Snapchat's Discover feature offers diverse content from publishers and creators, covering entertainment, news, and lifestyle. Augmented reality filters and lenses enable users to add interactive effects to their videos, fostering creativity (Karunakaran et al., 2022). YouTube Shorts, founded in 2020, is YouTube's answer to SFV platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, as expanded upon in the following section. It focuses on user-generated videos optimized for mobile viewing. Leveraging YouTube's infrastructure and creator community, Shorts provides a platform for discovering, engaging with, and sharing various short-format content, ranging from comedy to educational tutorials (Sahu et al., 2023).

TikTok, launched in 2016, has rapidly risen to prominence as a global platform for short-form video content creation and sharing (Meng & Leung, 2021). At the heart of TikTok's appeal is its algorithm-driven content discovery, which presents users with personalised feeds of videos tailored to their interests and preferences. With an emphasis on creativity, TikTok allows users to record and edit videos, incorporating music, and filters to augment their content (Ganev, 2023). The platform's 'For You' page algorithm facilitates virality, enabling content creators to reach massive audiences and generate engagement through trending formats. Instagram Reels, introduced in 2020, represents Instagram's response to the growing popularity of short-video form content that came with the rise of TikTok. Integrated seamlessly within the Instagram app, Reels indulges users to create and share videos, leveraging Instagram's extensive user base and engagement features (Karunakaran et al., 2022). With a focus on discoverability, Reels allows users to explore and interact with a diverse array of SFV content. The platform's editing tools, and music library empower creators to produce engaging and visually compelling content directly within the Instagram ecosystem.

TikTok consistently promotes content associated with particular hashtags, such as #BookTok, with the aim of boosting educational initiatives spanning diverse age groups, ranging from scholastic to tertiary levels. This strategic implementation within the platform underscores a commitment to community cultivation, as TikTok does not only showcase content from high-follower users (Maddox & Gill, 2023). Through exploration of various communities and the topics they cover, one can discern educational clusters and the corresponding community structures conducive to interdisciplinary collaboration. This approach also aids in the identification of important users who maintain significant influence within the platform's ecosystem (Fiallos & Figueroa, 2023). Virginás (2022) provides additional insights into these communities, asserting that such initiatives are achieved through engagement with fellow enthusiasts. These interactions lead to deeper understandings of the topic, empowering individuals to engage in discussions and offer advice on associated matters.

2.1.7 The Cosmetics and Personal Care Industry

In today's vigorous marketplace, the cosmetics industry stands as a captivating arena, characterized by a myriad of products promising transformative beauty experiences. The industry can be referred to as cosmetics and personal care (Alevizou, 2022), which continues

to evolve along with the contemporary technological advancements (Hassan et al., 2021). Amidst this landscape, consumers navigate a complex web of choices, seeking not only products that enhance their appearance but also brands they can trust implicitly (Diallo et al., 2020). However, the allure of cosmetics is often shadowed by inherent scepticism, driven by concerns over product quality, ingredient integrity, and the potential risks posed to one's skin health (Nohynek et al., 2010).

At the heart of consumer behaviour within the cosmetics industry lies a paradox: while consumers yearn for innovative beauty solutions, they also harbour a sense of caution fuelled by apprehensions surrounding product efficacy and safety (Choi & Lee, 2019). This paradox is particularly pronounced in an era where social media platforms serve as ubiquitous channels for brand communication and product promotion (Alhedhaif et al., 2016). As consumers scroll through a barrage of short-format videos (SFVs) showcasing dazzling cosmetic transformations, they are simultaneously confronted with questions of authenticity, reliability, and trustworthiness. The decision to explore the impact of SFVs on brand perceptions and loyalty within the cosmetics and personal care industry stems from a recognition of the unique challenges and opportunities inherent in this sector (Alhedhaif et al., 2016).

Unlike many other consumer goods, cosmetics and beauty products occupy a distinctive position wherein consumers not only invest financially but also emotionally in the pursuit of self-expression and enhancement (Ghazali et al., 2017). However, this investment is tempered by a pervasive sense of scepticism, born from past experiences of product disappointment or concerns over adverse effects on skin health (Hamilton, & de Gannes, 2011). Central to the investigation is the understanding that trust serves as the cornerstone of brand loyalty within the industry. In an environment where the stakes are high – both financially and personally – consumers gravitate towards brands that not only deliver on their promises but also engender a sense of confidence and reassurance (Hassan et al., 2021). Yet, achieving and maintaining this trust is no small feat, particularly in an age where misinformation proliferates and consumer scepticism looms large (Ghazali et al., 2017).

Conclusively, exploring loyalty to brands in the cosmetics and personal care industry is essential (Yang & Liu, 2014) as advertising is rather powerful to reaching customers and indirectly effect brand loyalty (Ababio & Yamoah, 2016), thus emphasising how consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for product discovery, recommendations, and review

(Hassan et al., 2021). Understanding how SFVs shape perceptions and loyalty towards brands can provide valuable insights into evolving consumer behaviour patterns.

2.1.8 Gratifications Niches

The Uses and Gratification theory (U&G) created by Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1973) provides a theoretical framework which attempts to explain why users are motivated to view and engage with certain types of media. Contemporarily this theory has become a popular tool in studying the digital media landscape, such as social media platforms and social media content (Kasirye, 2022; Whiting & Williams, 2013). The U&G theory aims to provide a rhetoric for why consumers engaging with social media content, and what they get out of it. This theory has been applied and operationalized to study what motivational drivers' users experience when viewing and engaging with SFV (Shao et al., 2023; Scherr & Wang, 2021). A study on the success of the social media platform, TikTok, looking at gratification niches by Scherr & Wang (2021). The results presented four distinct motivators positively associated use TikTok: socially rewarding self-presentation, trendiness, escapist addiction, and novelty. The latter three of the gratification niches are relevant to what users who do not post content themselves gain from using TikTok. Trendiness, a measure of how much the users thought the app and its content was relevant, new, and an exciting. Escapist addiction measured the degree to which participants used TikTok to take a break and be distracted from their lived reality. The third, novelty, has to do with the quality and subject of content posted by creators, brands, and other users on the platform. The novelty measure was the statistically strongest motivator for the studies participants. A study conducted by Shao et al. (2023), built upon Scherr and Wang's (2021) study, suggested that these motivations could be connected to passing time, entertainment, and communication. In addition, Shao et al. (2023) noted a need for more research linking the motivators to other types of media and social media platforms. By applying the gratification niches from Scherr and Wang (2021) to explore users' motivation in using short-format video platforms, in this case TikTok and Instagram Reels, we can explore how consumers use and derive both gratification and meaning from watching content on these platforms. Understanding the motives for consumers engaging with SFVs could provide insights into effective content creation strategies for content-creators and brand marketers.

2.1.9 Brand-Relationship Theory

The Brand-Relationship Theory proposes that there is an empirical relationship and bond between the consumer and brand (Fournier, 1998). This theory emphasises that a consumer's relationship to a brand more legitimate than a descriptive metaphor of how consumers relate to brands but argues that there is an active relationship between the two. Brand Relationship Theory addresses under which circumstances brand relationships are formed and what value they hold for the consumer, indicating that the higher the quality of the relationship the more durable it is. Through investigation of three case studies about consumer's lived experiences with the brands in their lives, Fournier (1998) found 15 types of relationships consumers have with brands, a dissolution model for casual and committed relationships and alternative brand relationship trajectories. Furthermore, Fournier (1998) distinguished three distinct factors that affected the quality of relationship between the consumer and brand. They were affective and socioemotive attachments, behavioural ties, and supportive cognitive beliefs, referred to as the six-faceted brand relationship quality construct (BRQ).

Affective and socioemotive attachments were linked to the love and passion consumers felt to brands. Love/passion-based were positively linked to higher relationship quality, expressed for example, as the relational typology of best friendship. This love was felt in varying degrees, ranging from warmth and comfort to infatuation or even obsession. Self-connection was another mediating variable which affects the relationship quality. Consumers felt more emotionally connected to brands which enforced their identity either as nostalgia, authenticity, or aspiration. Relationships high in this measure functioned as relationship maintenance, cultivating a sense of encouragement, or uniqueness in the consumer (Fournier, 1998).

The second factor, behavioural ties, was interdependence and commitment of the consumer with the brand. The former aspect, related to how often the consumer used the product, and was especially significant if the brand was a key character in ritual usage, or every-day use. Commitment as a behavioural tie was also found to affect consumer-brand relationship quality. This was expressed by participants through vows of exclusivity, and investment related claims because of their commitment to maintaining and fostering their relationship with the brand (Fournier, 1998).

The third and final factor found to mediate relationship quality was supportive cognitive beliefs, describes as the degree of felt intimacy and brand partner quality itself. Intimacy was found to signify the consumers unflinching belief of the product's utilitarian excellence. The stability of

the consumers intimacy with the brand was further found to be strengthened by the brands advertising efforts, such as slogans, which the consumer appropriated and even become nostalgic through the personal associations and experiences formed with the brand. This intimacy led the consumer to develop a bias towards their favoured brand, increasing the resilience of the cherished brand compared to competitors. Another variable which contributed to the consumers supportive cognitive beliefs of the brand was the brand partner quality. The quality of the consumer-brand relationship is not an unrequited love, or parasocial relationship. Consumers are attentive to, and perceptive of how the brand itself approaches and serves the consumer.

Fournier's (1998) synthesis of the participants brand stories distinguished the five following brand-to-consumer factors to be relevant in how consumers attitudes and behaviours were shaped. The consumers had stronger, and more positive relationships with brands that make the consumer feel cared for, listened to, wanted and respected. Consumers wanted brands that were reliable, and predictable in delivering what the consumers were promised. Consumers wanted the brand to conform to the implied rules and bounds of the relationship. Trust that the brand was reliable and going to deliver what the consumer expected. Finally, consumers felt the need for their brand to be accountable for their actions. Much like the need for reciprocity in person-to-person relationships, Fournier (1998) found that consumer-brand relationships require similar action and meaning to achieve a high-quality relationship.

The implications of how consumers in relationships with brands explore and maintain these relationships through SFVs on social media provide invaluable insights for marketers and industry professionals on how to improve consumer-brand relationships with current and prospective customers. Contemporary applications of brand-relationship theory have developed relevant findings in how social media affects the interaction between consumer and brand (Hudson et al., 2016; Wallace et al., 2022). The interactive nature of social media allows for a more equitable relationship between consumer and brand than traditional forms of media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Park et al., 2020). Research into the dynamic between Brand Relationship Theory and social media suggests that these interactions positively impact brand relationships with consumers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Wallace et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding brand relationship theory in the context of consumers relationships with brands could provide practical insights for marketers to generate higher brand loyalty and improve consumers brand relationship quality.

4 Method and Methodology

The Method and Methodology chapter aims to justify the selected research philosophy and research design. The chapter will explain the research strategy, research design and approach. In addition, the industry selection is introduced and justified. Then, the empirical data collection and the proposed method of data analysis is demonstrated. Thereafter, methodological reflections inherent in the undertaken research will be elucidated. The intent is to provide a justification for the methodological criteria chosen and its limitations, to ensure transparency in the research process.

4.1 Qualitative Research Strategy

The paper adopts a qualitative approach to comprehensively explore the research question, aiming to investigate consumers' understanding of semiotics in short-format videos and how these interpretations impact their perceptions and loyalty of brands. We argue that the necessary data required close interactions with the study's participants, thereby making qualitative research methods more appropriate than quantitative approaches. Given our objective to base the research on rich data, exploring consumers and their understandings rather than investigating statistical correlations, qualitative research was considered suitable. This approach also allows for a more flexible research strategy (Rose et al., 2023). The structure of the study leans towards social constructionism and interpretivism, complementing each other and aiming to understand individuals' meanings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Our focus on understanding the phenomena under investigation from the participants' perspectives aligns with the constructionist and interpretivist standpoint, as justified by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019). Tracy (2019) further supports this approach by explaining how reality and knowledge are constructed through communication and interactions within the interpretivist and social constructionist paradigms. Additionally, an interpretative stance connects to the abductive nature of the study, where unexpected data emerged during the research process (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). Through semi-structured interviews, the research investigates how underlying semiotic cues embedded within content on SFV platforms impact consumer attitudes and behaviours, illustrated within the context of perfume brands. The necessity for

close interactions with participants indicates a preference for understanding individual experiences and meanings, emphasising rich data and a flexible research strategy. This approach prioritizes depth and context over generalizability and statistical analysis (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019), thereby aligning the ontological and epistemological structures well with the study's objectives.

4.2 Research Design & Approach

The research design was founded upon the premise of the comprehensive interconnection among ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods and techniques. The research initially aimed to investigate the impact of short-format videos on social media platforms on consumer's perception of brands. However, due to the abductive nature of the study, unexpected discoveries during the data collection called for a reassessment of the research design. This further led towards a more focused exploration of consumers interpretations of semiotics in short-format videos, and how they impact perceptions and loyalty towards brands, which is illustrated within the context of the perfume industry. Therefore, the research seeks to understand the essence of the participants experiences and perceptions related the investigation's unit of analysis, semiotic cues in short-format videos, and its connection to brand perception and loyalty. In this case, a qualitative research design was considered complimentary to the aim of the investigation, providing greater flexibility, and allowing the study to evolve as it progresses (Rose et al., 2023). Aforementioned, the research design was modified, whereby the study underwent revisits with the empirical data, and the literature and theoretical background was revised. Furthermore, conducting semi-structured interviews allowed us to capture rich empirical data to illuminate the influence of consumers understanding of semiotics cues in short-format videos on brand perception and loyalty. This qualitative interview structure promotes an appropriate degree of reliability and validity (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the research question, as it sought to uncover new insights and perspectives within the established research, contributing to a broader understanding of how visual content influences consumer behaviour and brand relationships in the contemporary world.

The study undertakes a rather abductive reasoning, explained as "*a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning*" by Tracy (2019, pp. 28), which is often incorporated in exploratory

research, where we used existing theories as a starting point but also allowed for flexibility and openness to new insights (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Hence, this approach allowed us to refocus theoretical scrutiny and acquire new knowledge when analysing empirical data, referring to a back-and-forth process (Tracy, 2019). Moreover, the abductive nature of the study arises from the synthesis of findings and striving to comprehend the data thoroughly, thereafter, formulating plausible explanations and interpretations.

Initially, the research took a rather deductive approach, a top-down approach (Tracy, 2019), employing the existing theoretical framework of gratification niches developed by Scherr and Wang (2021) aiming to explore the distinct motivators of trendiness and novelty. These gratification niches were applied within the context of consumers motivators in using short-format video platforms and their understanding of the semiotic cues within SFV content, illustrated through the fragrance industry. Thereafter, as the empirical data from semi-structured interviews were collected, a rather inductive approach was introduced. This involved analysing the data through the lens of gratification niches while remaining open to identifying new themes and relationships that beyond the preconceived theory. Unexpectedly, we discovered new insights regarding the gratification niches, specifically identifying information-seeking as a new motivational niche. This inductive approach allowed for the consideration of contextual factors and background knowledge that were initially overlooked in the study's preliminary phases. Through inductive reasoning, this bottom-up approach allowed us to iteratively explore additional theories based on the empirical data regarding semiotics and brand relationship dynamics (Tracy, 2019). Hence, the Brand-Relationship Quality Construct by Fournier (1998) was chosen as an additional theory to evaluate these motivations in the context of brand perception and loyalty. Furthermore, we adopted the Peircean Sign Relation to understand consumers own interpretations of semiotic cues in SFVs (Chandler, 2022). Semiotic analysis is frequently utilised within advertising and marketing research to facilitate understanding of how individuals interpret advertising (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). It is therefore important to note that we do not conduct a semiotic analysis of content ourselves within this study, but rather explore how our interview participants interpret semiotic cues in short-format videos which is demonstrated in the context of perfumes.

Thereafter, by integrating insights from the literature and theoretical review with the emergent findings from the empirical data, we reformulated the research question and theoretical propositions. Furthermore, we aimed to establish connections between the observed empirical

findings and the theoretical frameworks, leaning towards an abductive approach. The undertaken abductive approach of the study aligns with the narrative method utilised during the literature review, where we initially decided upon a broader range of aspects (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), whilst remaining open to surprising findings, and thereafter narrowing the focus through continuous analysis and data collection, revising the theoretical background in line with the new discoveries, for instance connected to new gratification niches (Tracy, 2019).

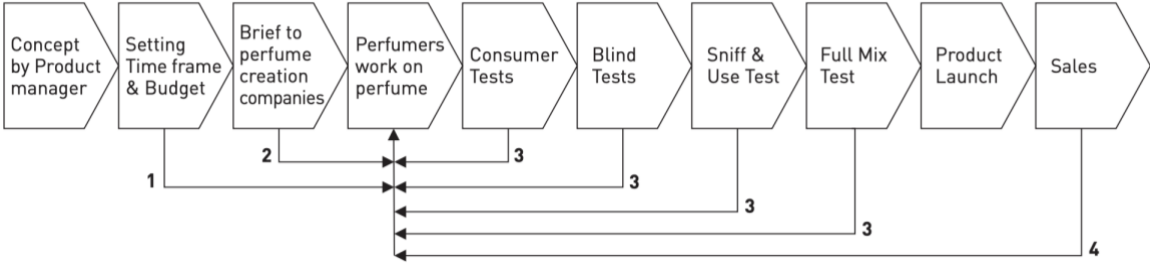
4.3 Industry Selection

The perfume industry was selected as the focal point for our research on the role of semiotics in short-format video marketing. The current usage of applying perfume to oneself is evident in the unifying anthropological ritual of adding to one's *sui generis* (ones unique essence) with artificial deodorising, or perfuming products as an aesthetic decision (Havlíček & Roberts, 2013; Roberts et al., 2020; Shiner, 2020). The perfume industry relies on symbols, and signs in their marketing communication to convey the scent characteristics of the product to the consumer. Unlike other cosmetics and personal care products, scent cannot be transmitted through the medium of short format videos. The perfume industry is a present across the globe the leading international key players are L'Oréal, LVMH, Procter & Gamble, and Coty (Paris et al., 2020). These manufacturing companies make up 60% of the global perfume market, producing both fine (e.g. Eau de Toilet, soap, body lotion) and functional fragrances (e.g. fabric softer, detergent) (Pike, 2011). The distinction between for example L'Oréal and Givaudan in terms of their roles of fine fragrance development is that the former corporate firm generates ideas, markets and sells the perfume, whilst the latter researches, develops and tests the scent (Paris et al., 2020). The corporate firms hire the expertise of scent experts, known as 'noses' in the fragrance industry, from fragrance manufacturers (e.g. Givaudan). The noses, alongside a handful of research colleagues, work to create new scent projects for perfume brands.

The process of a new perfume creation project at a commercial firm like L'Oréal begins with the product manager of the marketing department defining the target group, and desired visual characteristics from market testing insights. The release date, and budget is set early on to account for advertising, and store shelf space with retailers. The marketing department then contact fragrance manufacturing companies, like Giuadan, with a project brief to holding a competition where the firm with most satisfactory result wins. The formalized brief informs the

manufacturers of the desired aesthetic, and essence using images, poetry, or terms like mysterious, elegant, or flowery through storytelling. According to Paris et al., (2020) “The purpose of this story is to define what the perfume’s scent should represent for customers”. The noses at the manufacturing firms, develop and thoroughly test the fragrance on its quality (e.g. wear time) using the desired consumer demographic. The winning fragrance is evaluated holistically, usually by the brand manager, with the packaging, branding, and advertising as a final coherency test for the brand (e.g. L’Oréal) to decide whether the scent of the fragrance matches the branding (Paris et al., 2020; Pike, 2011). Paris et al., (2020) compares the marketing and sales of commercial perfumes to the likes of that of fast-moving consumer goods. The marketing and sales departments attract customers through the advertisement campaigns, the brand image, and the visual elements of the packaging and bottle. Exorbitant financial investments are poured into product launch campaigns, and therefore require significant sales soon after the launch to earn back the cost of product promotion.

Table 2: The development process of a new fragrance in the mainstream perfume industry from Paris et al. (2020)



Berman et al. (2023) underscores the strategic significance of olfactory cues as a powerful marketing tool. These sensory experiences have remarkable staying power in an individual’s memory. Notably, smell emerges as the most sensitive of the human senses, as highlighted by Hulten (2017). However, this sensitivity poses unique challenges for the marketing of perfumes, particularly in the context of digital media. Unlike visual and auditory elements, scent cannot be effectively conveyed through online channels, necessitating innovative approaches to bridge this sensory gap.

Recent research by Clement (2020), Eurostat (2018), and Nielsen (2018) sheds light on the popularity of cosmetics and perfume products in the realm of online shopping. Specifically, perfumes emerge as a product category that demands direct engagement of both olfactory and haptic senses (Barbosa et al., 2021). In their study, Barbosa et al. (2021) emphasize the critical

importance of developing and reinforcing online presence for businesses operating in the perfume and personal care market. This strategic move aligns with the industry's overall growth trajectory, driven by the increasing trend in consumer consumption.

Furthermore, Barbosa et al. (2021) propose that online retailers should adopt content strategies tailored to fragrances. These strategies may include detailed scent descriptions and other relevant knowledge presented online. By doing so, businesses can boost their digital footprint and better cater to the discerning preferences of online perfume shoppers. Consequently, this research underscores the significance of investigating how viewers interpret semiotic cues, and how they shape brand perceptions and influence loyalty. Thus, bridging the gap between visual communication and consumer behavior, shedding light on the relationship between semiotics, video content, and brand loyalty. This is illustrated through the perfume industry. To further support the need for conducting this research, Barman, Potgieter, and Tait suggests exploring each of the human senses in-depth to gain a deeper understanding of their specific relationship with consumer behavior. Additionally, Errajaa et al. (2020) suggests further research in how scents can be used in online marketing, as individuals are online to recall for information. Hence, our scope of study in regard to olfactory senses with brand perception and loyalty.

Pike (2011) proposes that perfumes are expressive and experiential goods, because they are both product and service brands. Aligning with Kettermann (2013) in that customers not only consume the tangible product but the meaningful experience of luxury. Pike (2010) elaborates that the material good is extended to include symbolic registers, and that it is the brand managers role to position the perfume in a domain of symbols (e.g. text, sounds, images) and signs to communicate the cultural meaning of the perfume's features. Because perfumes as a product are simulacra, they are representations of the tangible object, it is the brand managers role to communicate this representation through symbols to the consumers. The brand manager plays an agentic role in product development, they come up with the concept of the perfume (e.g. creating sending brief for manufacturers), and then inter-relates the brand with other metaphysical components (e.g. bottle, packaging). Their role is central in sign-value creation of the product for the consumer.

The perfume production process is reliant on multidisciplinary action from brand managers, marketing managers, and manufacturers in aligning and communicating the scent with the brand identity, and metaphysical properties of the perfume (Paris et al., 2020; Pike, 2011).

Because of the unique process of sing-value creation from the marketers to the end-consumer the perfume industry is a compatible industry to study if consumers interpretations of the signs do in fact give the product value. Furthermore, research articles have thus far focused on the up, and downstream process of perfume creation in-house between cosmetic firms, and manufacturers (Pike, 2011). The lack of investigation into how consumers appraise the final product of the arduous and costly development of perfumes outside of the firm and manufacturer in-house product testing (Paris et al., 2020). Furthermore, the perfume industry's reliance on visual and symbolic representation (ed. Pike, 2011) aligns with this studies research focus which is to see how consumers register semiotics in short format video perfume content.

4.4 Empirical Collection Method

4.4.1 Primary Data

In this research, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method to collect primary data, which is explained as the data derived directly from its original sources such as a survey or interviews (Collis & Hussey, 2014). We utilised semi-structured interviews, which offer a structured and consistent, yet flexible, approach whilst utilising open-ended questions to probe the interviewees' perceptions and understanding. Aligning with Coe et al. (2017) argumentation, the significance of employing this type of interviews lies in our endeavours to gain insights into the interviewee's knowledge of the subject matter through interactive dialogue. Thus, allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives in detail as established in this study.

4.4.2 Sampling Approach

The undertaken research investigates consumers' understanding of semiotics in short-format videos and how these interpretations influence their brand perceptions and loyalty. At the outset of the study, we found it intriguing to illustrate this through an industry where short-format videos on social media had increased. Among different industries discussed, the cosmetics and personal care industry emerged as a viable option and enabling us to utilise our existing connections within the field. As a result, the sampling approach aligned closely with our research objectives.

In this qualitative study, the sampling approach seeks to provide comprehensive insights into the research problem concerning a specific population. The chosen sampling approach aimed to capture relevant and rich data, to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the research phenomena. Therefore, non-probability sampling methods, in this case purposive sampling, was considered well fitted for our research design. This method ensured that individuals selected for inclusion in the study were pertinent to the research question, allowing for focused exploration (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). According to Jha (2024), this method can additionally be referred to as judgemental sampling since the researcher picks the specific sample for the purpose of the study.

The criteria-driven selection process, set prior to retrieving the sampling, held significant importance for the objectives of the study. One criterion was for the participants to use social media platforms containing short-format videos, specifically TikTok and/or Instagram Reels. Content related to cosmetics and personal care (entailing skincare, haircare, perfumery, etc.) was considered as an fundamental criterion for the sampling approach. These criteria were set to make sure that the participants were exposed to the type of content under investigation, thus enhancing the relevance of their insights to the study. This further helped to certify that the data collected was directly relevant to the research focus on the impact of short-format videos on social media platforms. Furthermore, another criterion applied in the study regards demographic in terms of age, where the participants had to be within the range of 20 and 30 years of age. This demographic criterion was significant for aligning the study sample with the target audience most likely to engage with and be influenced by short-format videos on social media platforms. This age range is typically associated with heavy social media usage and is therefore more likely to provide meaningful insights into the perceptions and behaviours of the targeted demographic (Scherr & Wang, 2023; Shao et al., 2023). The interviews aimed to be 30 to 60 minutes with each participant, for deep explorations and discussions of everyone's experiences and perceptions, facilitating a nuanced analysis of the research subject. The study concluded with nine interviews, which we considered sufficient based on our judgement, since there is no final answer as justified by Tracy (2019). Although sample size is important for researchers aiming for analytical strength and applicability, in this qualitative study, the emphasis is on data quality. We prioritize achieving richness, depth, and detail in the empirical findings and analysis (Tracy, 2019). While the sample size may be perceived as a limitation, its

rationale can be attributed to the temporal constraints inherent in the study (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019).

Each respondent was either contacted via email, face-to-face interaction, or direct messaging, and provided with comprehensive details about the study along with the topics to be addressed during the interview. Leveraging our pre-existing network facilitated the recruitment process, potentially indicating a convenience sampling approach (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). However, this approach facilitated access to individuals engaged in social media platforms featuring short-format videos, thereby potentially enhancing the study’s effectiveness. This methodological choice was made in accordance with the study’s objectives, research question, and the constraints imposed by the allocated time frame (Tracy, 2019).

4.4.3 Study Object Overview

The objects under study are individuals within the age range of 20-30 years old, using social media platforms, featuring short-format videos and cosmetics and personal care content. The subsequent section presents a synopsis of the study participants, accompanied by additional details related to interview duration.

Table 33: Summary of Interviewees

Name (Alias)	Age	Type of SFV platform(s)	Interview Length
Participant A	23	TikTok and Instagram Reels	51 minutes
Participant B	22	TikTok and Instagram Reels	65 minutes
Participant C	25	TikTok and Instagram Reels	31 minutes
Participant D	22	TikTok and Instagram Reels	41 minutes
Participant E	23	TikTok and Instagram Reels	51 minutes
Participant F	23	TikTok and Instagram Reels	40 minutes
Participant G	22	TikTok and Instagram Reels	42 minutes
Participant H	24	TikTok and Instagram Reels	55 minutes
Participant I	23	TikTok and Instagram Reels	39 minutes
Mean	23.1		45 minutes

4.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative nature of the research strategy in the study aims to investigate how consumers' interpretations of semiotics in short-format videos influence brand perception and loyalty, particularly illustrated with perfume brands. Thus, the empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with consumers to further understand their experiences and thoughts regarding the subject. Qualitative research emphasizes words and images in the data collection and analysis, further focusing on rich and deep data from the viewpoint of the participants (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). A total of nine interviews was carried out, with six interviews employing a face-to-face approach, in a physical setting, and three interviews were held digitally due to the participants being in different locations on the scheduled time for interview, utilising Zoom to both record audio and video. We wanted these specific respondents as a part of the research since they fulfilled the criteria. The interviews were conducted in English, a deliberate choice we made to increase broader accessibility to the study. Furthermore, the utilization of English in interview transcripts was deemed advantageous due to its commonness in both corporate and scientific domains, facilitating comprehension for subsequent researchers.

Prior to the initial interview, we created an interview guide to be utilised for the interviews (Appendix A). The creation of the interview guide was founded upon from the preliminary objectives of the study. Therefore, the objectives were broken down into specific topics and subtopics, and thereafter open-ended questions were developed, of the following structure: 1) Social media; habits, platform, usage etc., 2) Short-format videos; engagement, UGC and branded content, etc., 3) Perfumes; usage, etc., 4) Perfumery communication; ads, content, etc., 5) Brand perception & loyalty; relationships, influences, etc., and 6) Semiotics; aesthetics, visuals, audio, etc. This allows for a more structured interview, entailing follow-up questions and the liberty to steering the conversation to follow the topic (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed reflexivity in the interviewers' process, enabling us to further enquire areas that are valuable and relevant, but not included in the interview script guide (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This can additionally increase the likelihood of extracting the essence of the participants' sentiments or gain clarity on the participants' statements. The conversational nature of semi-structured interviews facilitated interviewees in articulating issues and topics they felt were significant to their experiences and reality. Additionally, open-ended questions were included to provide meaningful responses, further permitting flexibility, and encouraging exploration into the individuals' "how" and

“why” aspects of the phenomenon to promote elaboration in their responses (Jha, 2024). The semi-structured interviews relied on a predetermined thematic theme for questioning, wherein questions were not presented in a fixed sequence, but rather by our overarching themes, as presented in the interview guide (Appendix A). According to Longhurst (2009), this type of interviews encourages a lively interaction between interviewer and interviewee, where verbal interchanges are indispensable. Therefore, unexpected discoveries could be identified, such as information-seeking emerging as a new motivational niche to Scherr and Wang’s (2021) work, further enriching the empirical data of the study (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

As previously indicated, all interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the participants, subsequently transcribed to augment the study’s accuracy, and facilitate comprehensive analysis. A subset of the total interviews (six out of nine) was conducted with the physical presence of both researchers. In this structure, one of us directed the interview questions while the other managed the recording process, actively listening and interjecting with related follow up questions. This was alternated across the six, in-person, interviews between us. The other three interviews were conducted separately in a digital setting due to the participant’s physical absences on the scheduled interviews. To uphold participant confidentiality and encourage candid responses, individuals engaging in the interviews were assured of anonymity, thus identified solely as “Participant” followed by an assigned letter designation (e.g., Participant A, B, C, etc.).

4.5 Data Analysis

Making sense of the empirical data produced from the nine participants interviews is a multifaceted undertaking, requiring a combination of analytical approaches to extract rich insights. Since the research approach is abductive, combining both deductive and inductive reasoning throughout the process, we chose to analyse the data through thematic analysis, where the data analysis has been conducted in different ways due to its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

We followed Braun and Clarke’s (2012) approach to thematic analysis wherein we, first and foremost, familiarised ourselves with the empirical data by reading and re-reading the

transcripts. This was to understand analytically and critically what the data meant. Thereafter, we generated initial codes, which was done manually, incorporating a codebook to categorise the data into themes, categories, and codes (Appendix B), as well as utilising the software tool NVivo. The codebook was created before analysing the data, functioning as initial coding categories (Tracy, 2019), and were based on the gratification niches developed by Scherr and Wang (2021). Developing a codebook was helpful in ensuring consistency between the two co-authors as we analysed the same empirical data. Moreover, the codebook serves to clarify our research methodology for readers (Tracy, 2019). The software NVivo functioned as an indispensable tool for the thematic analysis of the empirical data derived from the interviews in the study (Bell, Bryman & Bell, 2019). Its utility extended to facilitating the methodical coding and categorization of data segments according to the thematic elements and conceptual constructs. Leveraging NVivo's functionalities, including coding queries and matrix coding, generated the insight of complex patterns, trends, and interrelations inherent within the empirical data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Tracy, 2019). The software served as an instrumental complement in the analytical process, helping us with the means to conduct an accurate and exhaustive exploration of the empirical data, thereby yielding significant understandings that contribute to achieving of the study's objectives.

As previously mentioned, we initially adopted a deductive approach in analysing the data, where Scherr and Wang's (2021) gratification niches guided the initial analysis. In this stage of the process the top-level codes (which we refer to as categories) trendiness and novelty, were applied to code and interpret the empirical data. Through NVivo, we used the text-search function, filtering stemmed words, to code the transcripts which is illustrated in Table 4. As the data was collected, we discovered unexpected codes for the gratification niches, information-seeking, that needed to be categorised and incorporated from the empirical material. Hence, an inductive approach of analysis emerged as we looked in the data from what the participants stated (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

An inductive approach of the thematic analysis thereafter took place, revising the research design and its correlated literature and theories. We found complementary theories to connect to the research purpose, thus incorporating the Brand Relationship Quality Construct by Fournier (1998) as well as the Peircean Sign Relation (Chandler, 2022) to code and categorise, yet again employing a deductive approach to the data analysis. The six-faceted construct developed by Fournier (1998) aims to understand the complex relationship between consumers

and brands, which enabled us to answer the research question. The decision to incorporate exploration of semiotic cues from the eyes of the participants was considered suitable for us to understand how these semiotic elements contribute to the perception of brands, connecting it to loyalty. To assure that the coding process was “*inclusive, thorough and systematic*” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 7), we also conducted independent coding on hard copies of the data. This approach allowed us to identify codes, categories, and themes with their associated text portions, thereby minimizing biased interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A modified codebook was made of the initial codebook to incorporate the additional gratification niche and theories (Appendix C).

Moreover, the thematic analysis provides a structured framework for organizing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012), facilitating deeper insights into exploring various facets of consumer engagement, preferences, and behaviours in response to semiotic cues in short-format videos, as exemplified through perfumes. Braun and Clarke (2012) further support the utilisation of thematic analysis in research due to its accessible and flexible nature of identifying and organising qualitative data, which was of great importance for our rather abductive research approach. Furthermore, these themes, categories, and codes sets the structure of the empirical findings and analysis, and the discussion chapter to answer the proposed research question of the study.

Table 44: Example for the deductive analysis approach

Theme	Category	Code	
Gratification Niches Participant B: “(...) it was rather the fact that it went viral (...)” Participant C: “There’s like a guy who super popular (...)” Participant F: “They are so, so high end and they are creative, but not creative, in a sense of trying to be super funny or entertaining (...).” Participant B: “I mostly like content that my algorithm feeds me...”	Trendiness Participant B: “(...) it was rather the fact that it went viral (...)”	Virality Participant B: “(...) it was rather the fact that it went viral (...)”	
	Participant C: “There’s like a guy who super popular (...)”	Popularity Participant C: “There’s like a guy who super popular (...)”	
	Participant F: “They are so, so high end and they are creative, but not creative, in a sense of trying to be super funny or entertaining (...).”	Novelty Participant F: “They are so, so high end and they are creative, but not creative, in a sense of trying to be super funny or entertaining (...).”	Interesting Participant F: “They are so, so high end and they are creative, but not creative, in a sense of trying to be super funny or entertaining (...).”
	Participant B: “I mostly like content that my algorithm feeds me...”	Participant B: “I mostly like content that my algorithm feeds me...”	Entertaining Participant B: “I mostly like content that my algorithm feeds me...”

4.6 Methodological Reflections

4.6.1 Ethical Considerations

It is essential to take ethical considerations into account as researchers, since it influences and affects other individuals, which includes confidentiality, transparency, permission, and participation (Tracy, 2019). Thus, in this study, the participants have had confidentiality throughout the whole research process and had the opportunity to withdraw at any point in time from the study up until submission of the paper. Furthermore, participants were given the freedom to guide the direction of the conversation during the interview, enabling them to feel comfortable and allowing them the liberty to respond to questions of their own choosing. Before each interview started, the participants were given explanations of the purpose of the study, procedure, and the opportunity to discontinue. Each respondent of the study provided voluntary and informed verbal consent both at the beginning and end of each interview. We kept the data privately between us in files only we could access, assigned pseudonyms to all the participants, and sought to delete the data after completion of the master's programme. This is further justified by Tracy (2019), who emphasise the importance of protecting participants private information and using tactics to do so. We further prioritized transparency, ensuring clarity and openness in this study. This commitment encourages trust, facilitates critical evaluation, and promotes knowledge advancement in academia.

4.6.2 Quality of Work

To ensure the quality of work for the research, the following criterions was evaluated, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criterions are alternative criteria's, to quantitative areas of reliability and validity, for assessing the quality of qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Lincoln and Guba (1985) confirm the quality of establishing these alternative criteria's is essential for the research to be considered trustworthy, further demonstrating its importance and relevance (Rose et al., 2023).

According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), research credibility guarantees accordance with established good practices, reinforced by validating findings with the interviewees to provide accurate interpretation, hence the utilisation of respondent validation in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe credibility as aligning the findings with the experiences of the

respondents. The concept of transferability in the research delves into specific contextual nuances, thus allowing applicability of the results in other settings (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Shenton (2004) defines dependability as incorporating detailed recording and coding techniques throughout the research process, hence our utilisation of NVivo, and further examination and verification of the empirical data methodologically and comprehensively. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further explain it to represent consistent and possibly repeated findings. Finally, confirmability holds the research accountable for maintaining consistent findings in alignment with the data, thereby safeguarding against personal biases as stated by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019), as well as Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Reflexivity is essential to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity from us and the influence our perspectives, biases, and assumptions may have on the research process and outcomes. Thus, given the interpretive nature of qualitative research as employed in the study where the goal is to understand subjective experiences and meanings, reflexivity helps to promote the validity and credibility of findings (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). Hence, we have reviewed and discussed the empirical data several times separately and together to understand the possible different perceptions. The software NVivo also functioned as a tool to categorise the data, as mentioned previously. Additionally, we sent the transcripts and findings to the participants in order for them to reviewed and validated them, therefore helping to mitigate bias and improve the certainty of the research.

4.7 Limitations

When conducting research, it is of great importance to establish the constraints of the study with transparency and honesty. The narrow focus of exemplifying the research through the perfume industry in short-format videos on social media platforms, exploring consumers perceptions and brand loyalty provided a great depth of understanding within the chosen context. The focused approach allowed the study to gain more nuanced insights that can inform theory and practice within the targeted population. It additionally served as a methodological choice to illustrate our research through the perfume industry. Sceptics may challenge the validity of self-report data, suggesting that participants' responses may be influenced by social desirability or recall biases, thereby compromising the reliability of findings. Nevertheless, we

undertook efforts to mitigate biases and ensure the trustworthiness of the empirical data, for instance by employing proper data collection protocols, utilised NVivo, member checking, and participants got to confirm the transcripts and interpretations of the data. The methodological choices made within the study have been justified, presenting its appropriateness in terms of addressing the research purpose and questions further generating rich and contextually embedded empirical data. Although, some may suggest that subjective interpretation and researcher bias compromise the reliability and validity of the study. Given the limitations outlined above, interpretations of the findings should be made with caution and within the context of the study's scope and methodology, recognizing the potential for bias and the need for further validation.

5 Empirical Findings and Analysis

The Empirical Findings and Analysis chapter entails showcasing the empirical data, which is used to support the findings of the study. Thus, it is utilised to explain individuals' perceptions and loyalty to brands through short-format videos on social media, specifically in terms of perfumery. The analysis highlights the dynamic relationship consumers have with perfume brands from their experiences using SFV social media platforms.

5.1 Gratification Niches

Table 55: Summary of Gratification Niches

Theme	Category	Code
<i>Gratification Niches</i>	Trendiness	Virality
		Popularity
		Trends
	Novelty	Interesting
		Entertaining
		Relevant
	Information-Seeking	Seeking information
		Educational
		Information

5.1.1 Trendiness

The first theoretical measure distinguished as an emergent theme was *trendiness* (Scherr & Wang, 2021), which was fervently recognised, and praised by participants in the perfume SFVs they view. They recognised that SFVs, particularly on TikTok, was a catalyst for perfume product trends. This appraisal was significant enough that 3 participants mentioned the virality of the perfume Baccarat Rouge, and Sol De Janeiro. These participants were further able to reason that these perfume trends were likely the

result of the sophisticated content-personalisation algorithm, and the various user communities present on TikTok. Overall, participants preferred succinct UGC content and appeared to enjoy the format, and content.

“In general I think UGC is very, very good. I like to scrolling through them (short format videos), you can easily skip them, but I prefer the shorter ones that are not like no longer than 30 seconds I would say. Especially if it's from a brand.” – (Participant G)

This participant was clear in their preference for short UGC videos, and that users can easily move onto the next video. Participant B, a frequent and active social media user, reflected on their observation of, and participation in #perfumetok. A perfume community on TikTok, where users and content-creators discuss, review, and recommend fragrances to one another. The compounded function of ‘topic’+‘tok’ is commonly used to distinguish the different communities users on TikTok are members in. Participant B is periodically engrossed in #Perfumetok and was therefore able to articulate and reflect on the recent trends in perfumes which reached virtual virality on social media. They shared that they purchased one of the viral perfumes, Sol De Janeiro 62.

“Sol De Janeiro, I think that one, wasn't necessarily like ‘oh if you're into these kind of notes then here's a recommendation’ it was rather the fact that it went viral... Like... on perfumetok, I think it went viral.” – (Participant B)

Another participant similarly reflected on the affect trendiness, had on their perfume related behaviour. Participant C, a content-creator, shared their experience with the attention *Baccarat Rouge 540* by Maison Francis Kurkdjian received on social media.

“I know this one's super popular perfume I think its Baccarat Rouge. I mean I kind of was influenced to go and smell it, but I didn't really like it. So, I didn't purchase [it] but I was ready to.” - (Participant C)

Not only did trendiness of the perfume, or fragrance brand itself appear as a cogent attribute in the participants use of SFV to engage with perfume content, but the creator itself appeared to have a motivational affect for the users. Both participant A, and C cited a content-creator called

Jeremy Fragrance, a German fragrance influencer who rose to fame for his unique, and sometimes ludicrously enthusiastic review of perfumes.

“There's like a guy who super popular...Jeremy fragrance he's really crazy... but regarding perfumes he knows what's up.” – (Participant C)

The participants reflections on how trends emerge and dictate their opinions, and behaviours towards perfumes appears not only to affect perfumes and brands but is further mediated by social media content creators.

5.1.2 Novelty

The other theoretical measure distinguished by Scherr & Wang (2021) is *Novelty*. This is the degree to which users are motivated to use a platform because of how interesting, entertaining, and relevant the content on the platform is. This measure was found to be explicitly strong in some participants who frequently viewed and engaged with perfumery communication on social media platforms but lacking for others. Furthermore, participants were articulate and expressed enthusiasm about the novelty of user-generated content. There was a distinct variety in the type of novel content the participants enjoyed, one such form content-creators employed was describing, and reviewing fragrances based on the context of when it should be worn, of what type of person would wear the fragrance. Participant B gave one such recollection of a SFV where a content creator suggested what type of person they imagined would wear the perfume.

“I mostly like content that my algorithm feeds me... like she was talking about ‘oh you know, the Pilates gurlies in New York [who] wake up at 5am and go to a Pilates workout, they have a pink matching workout set, and then they go and buy a matcha, that type of vibe, those people would like this perfume, because its kind of the same aesthetic.’ And then I knew, okay maybe that’s not a fit for me, because I don’t do that, I don’t like matcha, and I’m not a Pilates fitness gurlie. I’m more of a heavy lifter go to the gym person.” – (Participant B)

This type of UGC about the type of person who would suit the scent was mentioned by a handful of other participants as well. Through aesthetic and contextual description, such as the case with

Participant B, viewers are entertained when watching perfume SFV content on social media. This UGC content was very popular with Participant D, who enjoyed videos where creators recommended avant-garde perfumes based on unusual requests or obscene environments. Participant D found these types of videos entertaining because they found humour in the absurdity of the SFV content.

“I really like... when they're really strange. There was one I saw, that was like, ‘oh, when I want to think about World War 2’, and it was the gunpowder one with like [notes of] gunpowder, and blood and something. Yeah, that was funny.” – (Participant D)

Overall, the participants appeared to be entertained and engaged with UGC. On the other hand, when participants were asked to reflect on their attitudes and perceptions of brands own perfume content, the response was divisive. When reflecting on their opinion of brands perfume advertisements, Participant F expressed a sense of sense of admiration for the quality of the production, but fairly assessed the lack of novelty.

“They are so, so high end and they are creative, but not creative, in a sense of trying to be super funny or entertaining, but I don't know. When I think about them, it's so, so elegant it's, captivating.” – (Participant F)

This sense of admiration for sheer quality of advertisements produced by perfume brands was mirrored by many of other participants. However, admiration for the production is not synonymous with novelty. Some participants, when describing conventional perfume brand advertisements, described very similar scenes, and characters.

“When it comes to like a stereotypical perfume ad when like a woman's running around in a field and then like is in the arms of a man, like that doesn't say much to me.” – (Participant A)

The apparent monotonous semiotic icons, and symbols in brands own advertisements stress the high degree of originality, and uniqueness UGC provides to users who view perfume content. The negative affect of lack of novelty on social media platforms which host SFVs appeared to be consistent throughout participants testimonies, which participants citing feelings of apathy,

and choosing to ‘swipe’ past videos with low entertainment value. One participant was adamantly expressive about their sense of utter fatigue of brands perfume content, sharing that the ads were uninteresting among other things.

“I feel like most of them (brands perfume video advertisements) are actually really boring ... [They] kind of always look like a weirdly made indie film.... To be honest, I just don't find it very entertaining. I don't want to watch it, like I don't care. It just it feels like a stock image, like it's something AI generated.” – (Participant D)

5.1.3 Information Seeking

The data collection rendered from the interviews with participants unearthed an unexpected finding. This finding detailed an additional motivational niche which was the desire to use short format videos on social media platforms to search for information about perfume products. Participants were not only drawn to short format videos on social media to be entertained but also to conduct research on different products. The reason for using short format videos on social media for seeking this type of information as opposed to other mediums (e.g. websites, forums, longer YouTube videos) was due to the brevity and intensity of the format being ideal for those with short attention spans.

“Users like me who have like a short attention span, I want to be enticed, and I want to be entertained, but I also want to get valuable information fast.” – (Participant A)

Participant A explains why they are drawn to the short format video on social media. Participant I shared how their usage of social media as an information seeking tool to research products before purchasing them is beneficial.

“I do use social media for like researching products before I buy them and then those kinds of review videos are definitely something that I could use to get more information.” – (Participant I)

Product reviews were a popular type of content the participants noted. These review videos appeared to be a useful tool for participants to use to learn more about products. This preference

was true for Participant A as well, who further elaborated that content creators who produce UGC were more informative than brands own content.

“I really prefer informative reviews from content creators when it comes to fragrances because the conventional really beautiful, romantic ads are aesthetically pleasing to watch but don't actually help me in making a decision about what fragrance I want to try or buy.” – (Participant A)

Participant A shares that the reason why they prefer utilitarian reviews is to aid in their purchase decision making process as they find that brands content do not satiate their need for knowledge about a product. When asked how the participants thought brands could increase their communication efforts to cater to their needs and preferences, Participant E shared the following.

“Show the customer, an idea of how long this perfume should last... From just a campaign... I would get the aesthetics and maybe the sense of smell, but ...it would be nice if they would, bring up like ‘last all night’ or like [scent lasts for] 24 hours like they do with mascara or deodorant.” – (Participant E)

This participant recommended for brands to communicate the attributes other than the scent of the perfume, the same way other cosmetics and personal care products do. Participant E wanted more information about perfume products as it would improve their understanding of the product. The desire for more information about perfume products were echoed by participants D, who reflected on how brands can improve their level of informativeness.

” I also I find it way more informative when people (content creators) like post the scent breakdowns, you know when they show the top, middle and base notes. I really love watching those, like because it makes me feel like I understand what's going on. I think they (brands) could definitely improve on that, like be more informative... show me the breakdown.” – (Participant D)

This participant desired for brands to adopt a method used by UGC content creators where they break down the scent of the fragrance itself. Emphasizing the usefulness of showing the top, mid and base notes of the scent.

5.2 Six-faceted Brand Relationship Quality Construct

Table 66: Summary of Brand Relationship Quality Construct

Theme	Category	Code
Brand Relationship Quality Construct	Love and Passion	Emotional attachments
		Emotional investment
		Sense of not being whole without it
	Self-Connection	Identity
		Nostalgia
		Dependent
	Interdependence	Everyday Use
		Ritual
		Special Occasion
	Commitment	Loyal
		Committed
		Signature brand/product
	Intimacy	Irreplaceable
		Personal Association
		Nick Name
	Brand Partner Quality	Respect from the brand
		Brand Reliability
		Brand Predictability
		Brand Rule Adherence
		Brand Delivers Desired Result
		Brand Accountability

The next theoretical framework used to analyse the participants transcribed testimonies is Fournier's (1998) Six-Faceted Brand-Relationship Quality (BRQ) construct. These six factors appeared to vary in significance from participant to participant, and some facets showed to be more relevant in perfume brand relationship quality than others when participants reflected on their relationships with perfumes, and SFV content about perfumes. The affect the six facets had in shaping the participants relationships with perfume brands, and perfume products will

thoroughly be discussed below. To preface that, a summarising overview of the participants relationships with perfumes are beneficial to contextualise the sub-themes analysed.

First off, all the participants applied perfume at least once a day and had between 1 - 6 perfumes in their rotation. The type of perfume brands used varied from luxury perfume brands, like Prada, to entry-level perfumes brands, such as Zara. Each participant had a special relationship to each perfume. The factors that appeared to affect the relationship quality were, in no particular order, the following factors: scent of fragrance, longevity/quality of fragrance, brand, product price, impressions from others (compliments received), purchased for oneself vs. as a gift, and the appearance of the bottle and packaging. These appear to function as descriptors and motivators of the participants self-assessed relationship quality with their perfumes.

5.2.1 Love and Passion

The first of the six factors that Fournier (1998) believed to affect the quality of a consumer-brand relationship is *Love and Passion*. The participants descriptions of their relationships especially with their signature scents aligned with the Love and Passion factor which is categorised as an affective and socioemotive attachment. Participant F shared their love for their signature scent, Dolce & Gabbana *Light Blue* which they had worn for more than 4 years.

“And I really, really like it. And it's so fresh and I get a lot of compliments on that one. And I also think that it matches my personality.” – (Participant G)

Participant F’s self-assessed relationship with their signature scent was relatively tame compared to others. As the conceptualization of love in the BRQ construct ranges from infatuation to compulsion the participants emotional attachments to their perfumes, and perfume brands varied as well. Another participant expressed greater and more intense feelings of love and passion towards their signature scent.

“I was literally obsessed with the Rozu perfume. I had seen someone review it on TikTok and then by chance my mother got a sample of the perfume because it was new, and she gave it to me and I would spray the tester on my arms and fall asleep to the smell of it because it like gave me a rush of dopamine. After that I wished for that perfume for my birthday and got it. And I would always feel so elegant when I

would wear it. However, because of the price I can't afford to repurchase, which sucks because the other perfumes I have just don't compare.” – (Participant A)

Participant A expressed a more intense feeling of love towards their gifted perfume than Participant F. Pronouncing their sense of longing for Rozu, as the participant believes that it is second to none in comparison. Not to mention that the participant integrated the perfume in an intimate moment of the ritual of falling asleep to bask in the feelings of pleasure the scent gave the participant. This is a clear, and expression of the love and passion facet which is characterised by emotional attachment, emotional investment, and a sense of not being whole without it.

5.2.2 Self-Connection

The next BRQ facet to be analysed is *Self-Connection* another affective and socioemotive measure which affects the consumer's relationship quality with their brand. Self-Connection is different from Love and Passion in that it is dependent on how effectively the brand expresses identity thereby creating an opportunity for the consumer to identify itself in the brands product(s). This facet is not exclusively bound to current relationships but encompasses past (nostalgic), current, and even future (aspirational or potential) consumer-brand relationships. This BRQ facet appeared to be one of the strongest comparatively in this studies participant. Participants reminisced about past relationships with perfumes, sharing why they were attached to it then, and why the graduated to more sophisticated fragrances, or moved on to something different.

“I wore My Way by Giorgio Armani, I liked that it made me feel like a grown up, but then I feel like I grew out of that. I started associating it with how young I was, and also it is a very sweet and bubbly perfume, and I was like, this is too sweet for me. So yeah, I think I just grew out of it, I've literally suppressed that I used to wear that, like, religiously.” – (Participant D)

When thinking back to their use of the My Way perfume, Participant D, utters that as they grew and developed, so did their tastes, later stating that they prefer more savoury and androgenous perfumes like Jo Malones Lime Basil & Mandarin Cologne. The participant is able to latch onto the characteristics and traits of the brands perfume to find resonance in the product and

strengthen their felt sense of self. Participant A elaborates on this as they recount their most recent perfume purchase.

“I’m using Cozy Goddess from a company called Essense ... I thought the name was so perfect, because that’s the mentality I was in at the time [when I bought it], I wanted to be a Cozy Goddess.” – (Participant A)

The name itself, Cozy Goddess, allowed Participant A to project their desire for embodying their felt persona through purchasing, wearing, and displaying the perfume. The appeal of the name proved to aid the participant in forming an affective attachment to the fragrance. Participant E expressed an adjacent felt sense of resonance to the physical attributes of the perfume, as opposed to the lexical interpretation of Participant A’s Cozy Goddess.

“I kind of want to be more kind of just clean and girly and a bit more seductive with perfumes. I’m mostly drawn to, like, pinkish perfumes... [I’m attracted] just by the look of it, like the either the packaging, the bottle, or the actual perfume, like, the colour. So yeah, I’m just drawn to a bit more of a girly, nude, pinkish tones. Miss Dior, I do like, I also like the pinkish, like the bottle and the fluid is like a pinkish tone. I just like the vibe and like that it’s delicate and dainty... its classy.” – (Participant E)

Sharing their product preferences relating to the packaging, bottle, and liquid, Participant A has made a semiotic assumption that pink colours, are synonymous with girly, delicate, dainty, and classy traits. As a consumer their testimony reflects the capability that consumers have in making inferences about a product and brand due to the coded information stored in the symbolic meaning of visual communication.

5.2.3 Interdependence

Behaviour ties was another faction of aspects which impact the BRQ. This category encompassed the behavioural tie top-level code *Interdependence*, which relates to the frequency, purpose, function and context of the usage of the brands product. The participants applied perfume at least once per day, however the fragrance used was dependent on situational and environmental factors like season and occasion. This is not spontaneously decided by the

consumer themselves, but appears to be dictated by the SFV UGC, and brands perfume content. One participant touched on the phenomenon of a content creator recommending which fragrances are appropriate for specific situations.

“[They] go through them and review them and make videos of where it's like ‘if you're going to vacation these are the fragrances you should use’ or like, ‘if you're going on a Christmas date this is what you should use.’” – (Participant A)

This content-creator to consumer informational pipeline isn't exclusive to UGC. Another participant reflected on how they decode brands perfume commercials and conjure a set of rules about when certain types of fragrances are appropriate, and when they aren't.

“[When] there's an ad of a woman in a blue gown like out in the town. And like, men are staring at her then it kind of sells like a certain type of fantasy. And then if it's like, a day on the beach, sunny, good vibes, then I probably wouldn't use that perfume for, like, a night out on the town.” – (Participant H)

The consumer can unravel the subjective and nuanced visual information in the ads. This participant was able to render the semiotic information in the advertisement, in this case the participant interpreted the advertisement as instructive information that is this scent is to be worn in a particular environment. Depending on the consumers the brand relationship quality can withstand low affective attachment, and intimacy if the occasion of product usage is intense through frequent or ritual use. The next testimony speaks to this and introduces an additional factor that manages the interdependence facet.

“So, for special occasions, I have the one, and the Good Girl, the heel, So these two are more kind of an evening special occasion... They're a bit more expensive... The Good Girl one [I use] when I go out, or when I'm dressed up because it's very kind of seductive.” – (Participant E)

Carolina Herrera's Good Girl, and Prada's Paradox are reserved for special occasions because of the participants assumption that those perfumes are appropriate for such events and used sparingly due to their luxury status and high price. Although those perfumes are applied on

occasion, the participant maintains a special relationship to each product, strengthening the quality of their relationship to the brand.

5.2.4 Commitment

The second facet which encompasses Fournier's (1998) BRQ factor of *Behavioural Ties* is the consumers *Commitment* to the brand. Commitment as a BRQ facet is pictured as the consumers agentic and purposive behaviour and habits to promote longevity with the brand. Only three of the nine participants expressed a desire to maintain a degree of exclusivity with their signature fragrance. The participants reasons for why they choose to be committed varied.

"I'm pretty loyal to the products I use because it's such a labour-intensive process of trying new products to figure out what you actually like and what works for you."
– (Participant A)

This participant appeared to maintain current perfume brand relationships because of resource scarcity of time, energy, and effort. The implied risk of committing to a fragrance that doesn't 'work' for the consumers appears to be another aspect of why they preserve their current relationships. A different reason for, and expression of commitment are conventions or practices maintained with the aid of family.

"I cannot afford Dolce & Gabbana, but I think it's now my 4th bottle. Probably it lasts me the whole year and I think I'm going to have it at least the next few years as well. And as I mentioned, it also makes me think of my mom, or of my parents. It's just special to get it gifted Every year for Christmas." – (Participant F)

The ritual of having the perfume be gifted to the participant by their parents adds an additional dimension to their relationship with the perfume. If opting to switch perfumes, the participant may risk breaking the Christmas gift ritual performed by them, and their family. Furthermore, Participant F's stated intention to continue to use the perfume for the coming years additionally contributes to their behavioural ties to the brands product. Thus, some participants experiences illustrate how personal and familial interactions shape their perceptions and reinforces loyalty.

5.2.5 Intimacy

The third and final BRQ classification that Fournier (1998) suggested contributed to stability and durability was consumers *supportive cognitive beliefs*. One such supportive cognitive belief that affects the quality of the relationship is the *intimacy* felt by the consumer. Fournier's (1998) inductive analysis of her participants brand story recollections showed that intimacy was developed and maintained in several ways. She suggests that intimacy is created through rich layers of meaning and knowledge structures tied to the brand which affect the consumers beliefs about the product. Product superiority was one of the anchoring supportive cognitive beliefs. In the context of this studies participants testimonies intimacy was overwhelmingly expressed as their bias and interpretation of their perfume's scent(s). In the case of Participant F, the meaning, and knowledge derived from their relationship to the brand is linked to the memories, and relationship with their mother.

“I've always had the same perfume because my dad once gifted it to my mom. And I used to always compliment her on that perfume. I just loved it so much. And then at some point, they gave it to me for Christmas, because... it's pricey. [It's] Dolce & Gabbana, Light Blue.” – (Participant F)

The concept that BRQ intimacy is mediated and strengthened by personal experiences and experiences, was suggested to be linked with memories. In the case of Participant F, the added meaning and experiences they have with receiving the perfume during Christmas adds an additional level of intimacy to the brand's perfume. Besides signature scents, it appeared that participants lacked Intimacy with their fragrance or the fragrance brand. If anything, there was significant dissonance between how participants valued the fragrance, and the brand.

“I wouldn't say that I identify so much with Dolce & Gabbana. It's not necessarily the brand, but just the smell, because [it] is very fresh, very youthful....But I think that Dolce & Gabbana itself is more for more mature people. And I wouldn't say that I am the representation of a mature person yet.” – (Participant G)

The participant shares their separation of the perfume from the brand, stating that they do not identity with the brand itself, but the scent of the perfume. This testimony presents an indication that Intimacy is not all-encompassing and can be reserved for exclusive aspects of a brand, such as the product.

5.2.6 Brand Partner Quality

Thus far, the BRQ facets have centred on the experience of the consumer's relationships with the product in terms of feelings, attachments, intended action, and patterns of use. The 6th and final asset which regulates the consumers relationship to the brand is the quality of the brand itself. The implication of a brand as an agentic partner is best explored within the human-to-human relationship metaphor Fournier (1998) used to explore brand stories. With this metaphor in mind, *Brand Partner Quality* is the measure of how well the consumer believes the brand (partner) performs in the dynamic. The consumers assessment of this quality is deliberated on factors like felt respect from the brand, trust, reliability, and expectation fulfilment.

This *supportive cognitive belief* was divisive among the participants. Three of the nine participants were critical towards perfume brands they currently use or used in the past. This was expressed as disappointment in a feature of the product, or experience with the brand. One participant reflected on a controversy with a brand they used to enjoy.

"I liked Victoria Secret when I was young. I don't anymore. Mainly because of my own experience [with them] ...The brand itself persuaded me into not wanting to purchase from them again. It's more about their own controversy which I have come to know about through TikTok." – (Participant B)

Participant B's resistance continue purchasing from the Victoria Secret brand, was due to a corporate scandal which apparently affected the participants perception of the brand. The love lost between this consumer and brand impacted the relationship to the degree that they no longer wished to spend their money on Victoria Secret products. Of the 5 components outlined in Fournier's (1998) description of facets which affect the Brand Partner Quality construct, it appears that 3, and 4 where affected. (3) The brand's adherence to implicit rules between the consumer and brand and (4) trust that the brand won't deliver what is feared both appeared to be breached. According to the participants statement, the previously positive Brand Partner Quality was corrupted due to the brands controversial actions.

Brand Partner Quality and satisfaction can also be impacted if the consumer's evaluated brand performance is poor. Aspect 2, the brands dependability is delivering what the consumer expects was negatively impacted with Participant D. Not only was Participant D disappointed

with a perfume brand they admired, but that aspect 4 was also impacted because the brand did not deliver what the consumer desired.

“Sol De Janeiro... the yellow one...I think it smells really bad I don't like that; I really don't like the way it smells. I got influenced and I smelled it, and I like expected to smell the best thing that I've ever smelled in my entire life, because, like, the influences went hard on that. It just smells like strong vanilla. It was not good.” – (Participant D)

Naturally, fragrance preferences are individual dependent on the taste of the consumer. The participant was disappointed with the product quality of the perfume that they were looking forward to trying. Not only did this affect the consumers relationship with the brand Sol De Janeiro, but experienced a gap between what the content-creators review was and their personal experience with the product. The participant had not received accurate enough information about the scent of the product from the brand or the content creators, and therefore their expectations were not met. Therefore, it can be suggested that sensory experiences in the cosmetics and personal care industry, specifically regarding fragrances, is of utmost importance.

5.3 Semiotics

Table 77: Summary of Semiotics

Theme	Category	Code
Semiotics	Visual	Environment
		Colours
		Actions
		Actor
	Sound	Music
		Speech
		Effects
	Text	Captions
		Text on screen

This chapter will conclude with the following participants reflections on their semiotic interpretations of perfume short-format video content on social media and their relationships with tangible perfumes they have used. This includes, but is not limited to, the visual (i.e. environment, colours, actions, actor), sound (i.e. music, speech, effects), and text (i.e. captions, text on screen) of short-format videos. As well as their personal interpretations of perfumes, ranging from the sensory characteristics of the packaging to the scent of the fragrance.

We begin with presenting the findings of the cohort's analysis of the hidden meaning of the visual cues included in short-format videos from perfume brands. Participant I recall an advertisement from a perfumery house where their judgement of the video impacted their assumptions about the attributes of the fragrance.

“If there is harsh black and white makeup, then it's like a stronger scent.” –
(Participant I)

This participant made the connection between the colour and intensity of the makeup the character in the brand's advertisement is correlative with the intensity of the scent. This type of association between the visual aesthetics and fragrance scent was not unique with Participant I and was shared by many of the other participants.

“I think the colours... [are] very connected to the scent. If you have more floral and fruity perfume, I think the colours are more like, pastel [hues] like blues or pinks... And then if it's an evening [scent], or dark and mysterious [perfume] then you have dark blues and blacks.” – (Participant H)

Not only were the colours, and stylistic visual choices made by the brands effective in promoting semiotic interpretation from viewers, but the choice of character and props in the video appeared to be a source of participants semiotic analysis.

“They do it really well with the brand ambassadors they have...Dior Sauvage has had Johnny Depp and even though he's had some controversy it's the sort of adds to the danger and like mystery of Dior Sauvage.... I'm not Johnny Depp. I don't want to be in a desert, surrounded by wolves playing an electric guitar in a Mustang. That's just not me.” – (Participant A)

Participant A made inferences about the symbolic characteristics of the fragrance Dior Sauvage due to its controversial brand ambassador. The meaning this participant derived from their analysis is that the fragrance is a symbol of mystery and danger. This result was fortified by the inclusion of the advertisement being set in the wilderness of a desert, rockstar instrument in a classic car. Visuals are not the only sensory cues participants made inferences on; this participant shares their assumptions on what the perfume likely will smell like depending on the music used in the brand's short-format videos.

“I think it's mostly due to like the visuals...when like selling the dream... and the music itself says a lot. If it's a soft music instrumental like Debussy or piano, then it's probably a softer scent but if it's hard rock the smell is probably a bit deeper.”

– (Participant B)

This participant mentions that the genre of music used by perfume brands to sell dreams aids them in assessing the scent characteristics of the perfume in the ads. The auditory aspect of short-format videos appeared to be another important sensory stimulus which affect the viewers processing. The final semiotic aspect this chapter will report on through participants statements are the tangible components of perfumes. This participant compares the physical attributes of perfumes as a reflection of the quality, and price of the product.

“[When] comparing Victoria Secret body mist to a Dior Sauvage bottle, they're totally different. The Victoria secret one is plastic, light, super brightly coloured ...it is super cheap and not classy...Dior Sauvage is [made of] heavy glass, it has a magnetized cap, and the mister is like really slow... If I am going to buy something I want it to feel luxurious while I'm using it.” – (Participant A)

Product material was relevant for Participant A when assessing their opinion of the quality of the perfume. Judgement of whether the product is luxurious was dependent on whether the bottle, and cap were plastic, or magnetised, and the performance of the mister. Not only were the materials of the bottle important to the studies participants, but the shape appeared to be a divisive feature.

“I feel like I would never buy, for example, a perfume like Sabrina Carpenters that has like a weird shape...the chocolate bar... or like, the Carolina Herrera one with

the high heel. I wouldn't be caught dead having that in my house.” – (Participant D)

The shape of bottles, in this case a chocolate bar, and high heel, were deemed by Participant D to be distasteful. This negative emotion towards bottles in the shape of inanimate was felt so strong that they fear someone knowing the participant had it in their home.

“If it's a field of flowers, expect a flowery scent. Or like Sabrina Carpenter's [perfume] it's in the shape... of a chocolate bar, right? I mean, I've never smelled it, but I'm gonna go ahead and assume that it smells very sweet.” – (Participant D)

Regardless, of this participant's disinterest in bottles that looked like inanimate objects, they were confident, and comfortable making assumptions about how the fragrance was to smell. Participant D infers that if Sabrina Carpenters perfume is in the shape of a chocolate bottle, then it is very likely it is going to smell sweet, like chocolate does. Another form of semiotics stimuli is audio, in the case of this participant their analysis of the statement *“this is our best product”* from brands or sponsored influencers was associated with lack of trust due to the financial incentivisation.

“I'm going to trust content creators a lot more than if a sponsored influencer or the brand itself is like 'this is our best product yet and it's amazing' because obviously they're financially incentivized to say that.” – (Participant A)

6 Discussion

The Discussion Chapter summarises the key findings from the previous chapter, with emphasis on presenting the findings and analysis together with the research objectives and previous literature to holistically review the phenomenon and its implications for the field of consumer behaviour, marketing communication and the perfume industry.

6.1 Gratification Niches

In terms of the gratification niches, trendiness and novelty developed by Scherr and Wang (2021), this study highlights the significant influence of social media platforms, specifically short-format videos, on exploration of perfumes.

Participants noted the emergence of trendiness as a key factor, with certain perfumes gaining virtual virality, such as Baccarat Rouge and Sol De Janeiro (*“I know this one's super popular perfume I think its Baccarat Rouge”* – Participant C). Content-personalisation algorithms and user communities on TikTok played a role in driving these trends, reflected upon by the participants themselves (*“Like... on perfumetok...it went viral”* – Participant B). Supporting those reflections, Maddox and Gill (2023) argue that these TikTok communities are strategic implementations of the platform to cultivate communities, further boosting educational initiatives. Additionally, Fiallos and Figueroa (2023) emphasize how influential users maintain substantial influence within the platform ecosystem, which shed light on how community and influential users contribute to the emergence and diffusion of trends within SFV platforms. Virginás (2022) puts emphasis on engagement with fellow enthusiasts, supporting how communities promote trends in the perfume industry. This engagement among users develops a deeper understanding of fragrances, active participation of discussions within the topic, as well as providing advice.

Participants, including active social media users and content creators, reflected on how trendiness influence their perfume-related behaviour. One participant was influenced to go and smell a perfume, whilst another participant bought a perfume due to that was viral on TikTok

(*“I kind of was influenced to go and smell it” - Participant C*). Justifying these participants behaviours, Hassan et al. (2021) explaining that consumers are turning to digital platforms for product discovery, thus these participants experiences illustrate the power of digital platforms in shaping consumer behaviour. This further serves as a practical example of the phenomenon described by Hassan et al. (2021), showing how social media platforms have become important in shaping consumer choices, especially in areas such as product discovery, recommendation, and reviews.

Other participants mentioned that the impact of viral social media content creators themselves can shape opinions and behaviours towards perfumes. For instance, a German fragrance influencer was mentioned to have a unique reputation and identity on social media (*“Jeremy fragrance he's really crazy... but regarding perfumes he knows what's up.” -Participant A*). This can be connected to Babalan and Racs (2020) evidence that content creators have significant communities due to their personal brand. Thus, content creators who gain significant attention on social media, and grow to be trendy creators, can have noteworthy influence on consumers within these platforms.

Participants in the study showed a strong preference for user-generated content over conventional perfume brand advertisements due to its novelty, entertainment value, and relevance (*“Yeah, that (UGC video) was funny” – Participant D*). These preferences in content underscores the effectiveness of SFVs in capturing consumer attention and shaping brand perceptions through novel and user-driven content, as explained by both Kaye et al. (2022) and Rodgers and Thorson (2019). UGC, particularly videos where creators describe fragrances in contextual and aesthetic terms, was highly engaging for viewers (*“There was one I saw, that was like, ‘oh, when I want to think about World War 2’, and it was the gunpowder one with like [notes of] gunpowder, and blood...” – Participant D*). They enjoyed content that portrayed unconventional scenarios or catered to specific tastes, finding humour and entertainment in its uniqueness (*“I really like... when they're really strange.”- Participant D*). This mirrors the broader trend where SFV allows users to infuse their interpretations into brand narratives, thus actively participating in content creation and engagement aligning with Bobrie (2018) and Sykora et al. (2023).

In contrast, conventional brand advertisements were criticised for lacking novelty and entertainment in engaging users with perfume content on social media platforms (*“To be honest,*

I just don't find it (brands perfume videos) very entertaining.” - Participant D). The dissatisfaction with conventional brand advertisements, as noted by participants, highlights a critical aspect of brand communication strategies. As stated by Knoll (2016) consumer attitudes are positively linked to the entertainment value of the brands advertisement. While brands strive to craft intentional messages through curated visuals and semiotic cues as explained by Faizan (2019), the lack of novelty and engagement in such content can lead to consumer apathy. This is consistent with the literature of authors such as Chen et al. (2023), Jingga et al. (2023), and Yin et al. (2024), which emphasizes the role of SFVs in reshaping social media content creation and consumption, thus empowering users to engage with content in innovative ways. The findings are consistent with the literature, Ruangkanjanases et al. (2023) and Xiao et al. (2023), emphasising the roles both UGC and branded content play in shaping consumer perceptions, with UGC standing out for its ability to engage and entertain through innovative and contextually rich content.

Information seeking, an additional motivational factor emerged, highlighting the participants' desire to use short-form videos on social media platforms for information retrieval about perfume products. Scherr & Wang's (2021) theory of gratification niches did not account for information seeking as a motivation niche for using short-format videos on TikTok. The participants were not solely attracted to short format videos for entertainment purposes but also utilized them as a source of information seeking, and knowledge acquisition. Shao et al.'s (2023) hypothesis that the fast-paced nature of modern life increases the need for short, and convenient mediums of communication with a wealth of information aligned with the findings of this study (*“Users like me who have like a short attention span, I want to be enticed, and I want to be entertained, but I also want to get valuable information fast.”* – Participant A).

Participants shared the use of short format videos on social media as a tool for product research (*“I do use social media for like researching products before I buy them...”* – Participant I), and that they prefer user generated reviews about products over brands content (*“I find it way more informative when people (content creators) like post the scent breakdowns”* – Participant D). These findings agree with Babić Rosario et al.'s (2020) definition of, and research about eWOM because this study's findings emphasized the participants desire to rely on eWOM to inform themselves about a product before purchase to mitigate risk of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the findings suggested that participants desired more specific, and clear knowledge about the products attributes, like how long the scent lasts, and the ingredient break down (*“Show the*

*customer, an idea of how long this perfume should last... ” – Participant E, “...post the scent breakdowns, you know when they show the top, middle and base notes.” – Participant D). These findings align with Knoll's (2016) findings as the participants desired for the brands advertisements to be more informative is complementary to his. This further aligns with Diallo et al. (2020)'s finding that brand trust is associated with functional brand images. According to the participants, the perfume brands lacked functional brand images, and utilitarian marketing communication and therefore trusted UGC reviews more than brands own communications (*I'm going to trust content creators a lot more than...the brand itself... because obviously they're financially incentivized to say that.*” – Participant A)*

6.2 Six-faceted Brand-Relationship Quality Construct

6.2.1 Love and Passion

Fournier's (1998) first factor affecting consumer-brand relationships, *Love and Passion*, is exemplified in participants' attachments to their signature scents which reflects a deeper socioemotive connection (*"I was literally obsessed with the Rozu perfume"* – Participant A). Aligning with the literature, these attachments is supported by Diallo et al. (2020) and Ghazali et al. (2017) explaining how consumers seek products that not only embellish their appearance but also resonate emotionally and build trust. Furthermore, it illustrates the deep emotional connections consumers can form with beauty products, where this emotional investment is critical in a sector where consumers often face skepticism due to concerns over quality and safety of the product, as exemplified by Nohynek et al. (2010) and Choi and Lee (2019). As several participants showcased their attachments to specific perfumes. Some participants experienced had a longstanding relationship with a perfume aligned with their personality and receiving compliments (*... I get a lot of compliments on that one. And I also think that it matches my personality*” – Participant G). which could be connected to Diallo et al. (2020) evidence of consumers drawings to brands they trust implicitly. Another participant felt an intense obsession and emotional fulfillment from a scent despite being unable to afford it.

In contrast, there were participants whose emotional bonds with their perfumes varied, which further reflects the broader trend of consumers seeking products that reflect their personal identities and emotional needs (*"Miss Dior...I just like the vibe and like that it's delicate and*

dainty... its classy.” – Participant E). This can further be correlated to Havlíček & Roberts (2013) state that as perfumes contribute to social identity and status, scent choices often reflect the personal and social narratives, thus the variety.

6.2.2 Self-Connection

The self-connection facet of the BRQ construct allows consumers to see themselves in the brand’ products and was notably strong among the participants. It further emphasizes the deep, identity-related bond consumers form with brands. For instance, one participant described outgrowing a perfume as they matured, favoring more sophisticated scents with time (*I wore My Way by Giorgio Armani, I liked that it made me feel like a grown up, but then I feel like I grew out of that. I started associating it with how young I was.*” – Participant D). Which relates to Havlíček and Roberts et al. (2020) point of scents chosen to be compatible with oneself and as an aesthetic decision. Another participant aligned their perfume with their desired persona, which can further be explained with the development of cultural constitution of identity regarding fragrances, as justified by Shiner (2020) (*“Because that’s the mentality I was in at the time [when I bought it], I wanted to be a Cozy Goddess.”* – Participant A).

Short-format videos are particularly effective in the cosmetics and personal care industry for showcasing brand stories and personalities, which cultivates a sense of connection and trust according to Chen et al. (2023) and Ruangkanjanases et al. (2023). This is crucial for perfumes, which rely heavily on sensory and emotional appeal, making them suitable for engaging content that SFVs offer. A participant explained how they were drawn to perfumes with specific attributes, since they preferred certain association and traits (*“I kind of want to be more kind of just clean and girly and a bit more seductive with perfumes”* – Participant E). This further illustrates how consumers form affective attachments based on the brand’s symbolic and identity-related cues as suggested by Ghazali et al. (2017). The self-connection the participants showcased in their experiences emphasizes how consumers resonate with brands that reflect their self-identity. This deep-seated connection can drive brand loyalty, as emotionally invested consumers are more likely to remain loyal to brands that align with their identity and values, supported by Hassan et al. (2021).

6.2.3 Interdependence

As the impact of behavioral attribute on Brand-Relationship Quality, the interdependence facet focuses on the usage of perfumes. Participants indicated that their perfume choices were influenced by factors including situational and environmental considerations, such as season and occasion (“*The Good Girl one [I use] when I go out, or when I'm dressed up because it's very kind of seductive*” – Participant E). It was evident that content creators played a role in recommending suitable fragrances for specific situations, further supported by Diallo et al. (2020) in terms of quest for reliable information in navigating product choices (“*[They] go through them and review them and make videos of where it's like... 'if you're going on a Christmas date this is what you should use.'*” – Participant A). This is also coherent with Hassan et al. (2021) and Yin et al. (2024)’s points of how consumers go to digital platforms for product information and recommendations.

Additionally, some participants decoded brand perfume commercials to determine when certain fragrances were appropriate, based on the depicted scenarios (“*If it's like, a day on the beach, sunny, good vibes, then I probably wouldn't use that perfume for, like, a night out on the town.*” – Participant H). Havlíček and Roberts (2013)’s paper aligns well with these findings as it highlights the significance of scent in human communication and identity construction. Building onto the literature, participants also demonstrated a special attachment to certain perfumes reserved for special occasions, indicating that infrequent usage could still strengthen their relationship with the brand.

6.2.4 Commitment

Through the nine interviews conducted in the study, it was found that commitment to a brand is often driven by factors such as the investment of time and effort required to find a suitable product and the perceived risk of switching to a new fragrance. One participant said cited loyalty to products due to the arduous process of trial and error in finding what works for them (“*I'm pretty loyal to the products I use because it's such a labour-intensive process of trying new products*” – Participant A).

Another participant highlighted the sentimental value attached to a specific perfume gifted by their family, which creates a ritualistic bond with the brand (“*It also makes me think of my mom,*

or of my parents. It's just special to get it gifted Every year for Christmas.” – Participant F). This familial tradition adds complexity to the participant’s commitment, as switching perfumes may disrupt the tradition, which could be with what Ghazali et al. (2017) describes as emotional investment. Furthermore, both Bromley (2000) and Roper and Fill (2012) discuss how brand perception, influenced by direct interactions, play a critical role in brand loyalty.

6.2.5 Intimacy

Intimacy, a key aspect, is nurtured through rich meaning and knowledge structures tied to the brand, impacting customer beliefs about the product. Participants’ brand story recollections illustrated intimacy’s development through personal experiences, like one participant’s emotional connection to a specific perfume, associated with memories of family and Christmas (*“I just loved it so much. And then at some point, they gave it to me for Christmas,”* - Participant I). This suggests that intimacy is mediated and strengthened by personal experiences, enhancing the brand relationship. Linking it to previous literature, Hassan et al. (2021) and Yang and Liu (2014), suggests that the emotional connection is necessary for cultivating brand loyalty, which is significantly influenced by trust and personal experiences. It can also be connected to the physiological significance of scent in human interactions, as Shiner (2020) explains that the olfactory system plays an important role in how we relate to fragrances and, by extensions, to brands. However, some participants separated the perfume from the brand, indicating that intimacy might not extend to all aspects of the brand, but could be exclusive to certain products (*“I wouldn't say that I identify so much with Dolce & Gabbana. It's not necessarily the brand, but just the smell.”* – Participant G).

6.2.6 Brand Partner Quality

The sixth and final asset of the BRQ construct regards Brand Partner Quality, which is shaped by respect, trust, reliability, and expectation fulfillment. For one participant, corporate scandals and controversies associated with the brand led to a decline in Brand Partner Quality, where their experience significantly impacted the consumer’s willingness to engage with the brand (*“I liked Victoria Secret when I was young. I don't anymore. It's more about their own controversy which I have come to know about through TikTok.”* – Participant B) This aligns with Diallo et al. (2020), who emphasize that consumers seek brands they can trust implicitly. Therefore, as established in this study, it is important to have effective communication to maintain positive

Brand Relationship Quality. The literature on communication, for instance Gordon (2024) and Mooij (2022), supports this by emphasizing that marketing strategies need to be culturally and contextually relevant. The failure of brands to communicate effectively or to manager their image considering controversies can lead to a significant drop in consumer trust and loyalty.

Similarly, dissatisfaction with product performance can also affect the facet, as mentioned by one participant. In this instance the brand's failure to meet expectations regarding scent led to a gap between consumer's anticipated experience and the actual product, resulting in diminished satisfaction and a strained relationship with the brand (*"I like expected to smell the best thing that I've ever smelled in my entire life, because, like, the influences went hard on that...It was not good..."* - Participant D). Linking this to the literature, consumers are often skeptical due to these concerns as mentioned by Nohynek et al. (2010) and Choi and Lee (2019). In addition, this ties into the broader discussion in the literature about the high stakes of brand trust in the cosmetics and personal care industry as described by Hassan et al. (2021).

Emphasized in the literature, by Scherr and Wang (2021) and Yin et al. (2024), is the shift in consumer behavior to rely on digital platforms for product discovery and engagement. An outcome of the study reflects how digital content, especially from content creators, can both positively and negatively affect the Brand Partner Quality. A participant's disappointment with a fragrance was due to misleading online reviews parallels findings by Yang and Lee (2022) and Yin et al. (2024) on how SFVs shape consumer expectations and perceptions. This emphasis on the influence of social media, particularly short-format videos, on consumer perceptions and brand loyalty as Alhedhaif et al. (2016) . This aligns with the notion that digital consumer behaviour is shaped by the information and experiences shared on social media explained by Kaye et al. (2021, 2022).

6.3 Semiotics

Semiotics were operationalised in the study by asking participants questions related to their interpretations of the objects, people, text, sound and aesthetics in short-format video content about perfumes. The participants appeared confident in making inferences about the visual, auditory, and tangible elements of the perfumes shown in short format videos (*"If there is harsh black and white makeup, then it's like a stronger scent."* – Participant I). Looking at the

participants attitudes, knowledge, understanding and opinions about semiotics in short format videos using the Peircean Sign Relation provides insights into their analytical capacity. The participants were more attentive and skilled at recognising iconic symbols in short format videos than any of the other sign relations. The participants made assumptions that if the object in the video resembled an ingredient, they expected the perfume to smell as such (“*Sabrina Carpenter’s [perfume] it’s in the shape... of a chocolate bar... I’m gonna go ahead and assume that it smells very sweet...*” – Participant D). The objects in short format videos appeared aid the participants in of forming perceptions of the fragrance and brand if the object resembled something familiar.

However, the more symbolic the objects in the brands short format videos the more challenging participants found interpreting meaning of the symbol. The probable cause of this is twofold, the first being that the participants may have lacked knowledge of the symbolic convention prescribed to the object (*When like a woman’s running around in a field...that doesn’t say much to me.*” – Participant A). The second being that they were at an inherent disadvantage due to their individualistic culture (Mooij, 2022). Individualistic cultures generally use direct communication in advertising, which is reliant on explicit descriptions of product characteristics, and features. So, when participants were faced with a symbolic sign relation, and they lack the representational or situational knowledge to comprehend the symbol it is not possible for the consumer to derive the intended meaning. According to Faizan (2019), if the consumer is not able to read the connotation of the sign or the connotation of the sign doesn’t exist in the culture the semiotic meaning of the advertisement has failed to be effective.

The participants reflections on indexical sign relations were most apparent when reviewing the tangible attributes of the brands perfumes. Peirce’s description of indexical sign relations is nearly causal. This was exhibited in the testimonies when participants made connections between the shape, and material of the perfume bottles. This was exemplified as glass bottles, magnetised lids, and non-symbolic bottles were connected to luxury, and sophistication. If the bottle was more juvenile in its visual, and tactile presentations participants expected the product to be of lower quality, and price (“*The Victoria secret one is plastic, light, super brightly coloured...it is super cheap and not classy*” – Participant A). The link between the object and participant were forged through their individual experiences with a variety of perfumes. An extended expression of indexical recognition in participants were their associations of the perfumes to certain rituals, friends, partners, or parents. One participant in particular was

exceptionally loyal to their signature perfume because of the attachment between the perfume and the annual holiday ritual of receiving it as a gift (*“It’s just special to get it gifted Every year for Christmas.”* – Participant F).

The participants agency in semiotically decoding the perfumery content they had engaged with is that they were able to decide whether the product, or brand was a complimentary match to their identity. They were able to assess whether the associated meaning of the product was something they wanted to absorb as an extension of their identity (*“... I’m not Johnny Depp. I don’t want to be in a desert, surrounded by wolves playing an electric guitar in a Mustang. That’s just not me.”* – Participant). As Kettermann (2013) proposed, the participants did not only consume the utilitarian function of the perfume, but the semiotically derived meaning of it.

7 Conclusion

The Conclusion chapter is to summarise the findings and assesses the degree to which the study fulfilled the thesis' research purpose and research question. Additionally, this chapter will feature both theoretical contributions as well as managerial implications derived from the study's findings. Finally, reflections on the limitations of the study will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be proposed.

7.1 Research Purpose and Question

The purpose for investigating this particular topic was to explore consumers understanding of semiotics in short-format videos, and how these interpretations impacted their brand perceptions and loyalty, illustrated within the context of perfume brands. By examining the nuanced meanings and interpretations consumers attachment to brands, the research strengthened the understanding of the significant role semiotics plays in shaping consumer behaviour and brand relationships in digital marketing and social media engagement. This investigation addressed the research question:

How do consumer interpretations of semiotics in short-format videos influence brand perceptions and loyalty?

In conclusion, the empirical findings indicated that trendy and novel modes of communication in SFV content created positive and strong brand perceptions as exemplified with perfume brands. This was particularly significant with brands consumers had not yet tried but became known due to virality on social media platforms. Semiotic cues on SFV platforms have cultivated strong consumer engagement and loyalty by making certain brands and products culturally relevant, emotional resonant, and highly desirable. User-Generated Content as a medium of SFV adds authenticity to the semiotics cues associated with brands, reflecting real-life experiences and opinions, thus, influencing consumer behaviours.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

As this study adopted two theoretical models in the pursuit of aptly answering the research question, the foremost contributions are to extending the applicability of motivators of Gratifications Niches, and the Brand Relationship Quality construct. To our knowledge, and as of the date of submission, no study has ventured to research the operationalised objectives used in this study.

First, the scholastic contribution of using Scherr & (2021) Gratifications Niches, trendiness and novelty, was the development of empirical exploration of the theory outside of the original studies demographic sampling of mainland Chinese youths. Also, our research found information-seeking to be a motivation of using short-format video platforms, which supports Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) findings in the Uses and Gratification Theory. Furthermore, as explicitly stated in Scherr & Wang's (2021) article's future research, this study accomplished linking gratification niches to a specific content, as this study used perfumery content as an example of how the model could be studied. The other limitation in their study which this thesis addressed is applying their gratification niches onto social media platforms other than TikTok, such as Instagram Reels. Thus far, Gratification Niches have exclusively been researched in a quantitative capacity, consequently this study's usage of a qualitative research method produced insights into the sophisticated logic, opinions, attitudes, and nuanced emotions of users. The theoretical contribution has strengthened the transferability of Scherr & Wang's (2021) theory of gratification niches.

In contrast with the contemporary Gratification Niches theory, decades old and ubiquitous theory of Brand Relationship Quality provided fewer gaps for the researchers to explore. However, this study sought to investigate the mediating effects of semiotics in social media short format videos, on brand perception and loyalty which gave way for a complimentary fit. Not only did this study investigate how, and why consumers relationship qualities were affected by both UGC and brand's own, but also the degree to which semiotics impacted said relationship.

The third, and final area of theoretical contribution is to the study of semiotics. At this time, there is a scarcity of research articles which investigate how consumers make sense of visual,

textual, auditory and tactile symbols, and metaphorical symbolism in social media content. With the rapidly developing media landscape, the study of analytical eloquence of consumers will likely prove to become increasingly relevant. Our study also highlights the importance of innovative communication methods in short-format videos for enhancing perceptions and loyalty towards brands. Thus, contributing to the theoretical literature regarding content creation, distribution, and engagement strategies in the digital marketing landscape. Overall, the research we have conducted contributed to qualitative studies within the field of consumer perceptions in short-format videos (Apasrawirote et al., 2022), that have predominantly been focused on quantitative metrics (Chen et al., 2022; Qin et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2023; Yang & Lee, 2022; Yin et al., 2024). Aforementioned, this research adds onto the deeper emotional commitment to brands, as apparent in our study (Yang & lee, 2022; Xiao et al., 2022). In addition to applying a semiotic model, the Peirce's Sign Relation (Chandler, 2022) to a new domain, short format videos on social media.

7.3 Managerial Implications

The glaringly obvious implication of the results produced from this study impacts marketers of all perfume houses set on integrating short-format videos into their marketing communication portfolios. Marketing managers, and creative directors of perfume brands should be cautious of compressing video advertisement campaigns for social media publishing, as it may be met with user's disinterest. Due to the stylistically fast-paced, and high novelty in the pursuit of trendiness users expect a certain genre of content on social media apps which offer entertainment value such as TikTok. However, completely departing from the brand identity on short-format video platforms risks causing confusion, among other unanticipated consequences from viewers. Another implication for marketing managers, and social media managers is to be cautious when integrating symbolic symbols in short format video as users may experience fatigue and frustration is having to analytically interpret meaning. For social media managers to increase viewership, and engagement this studies results suggest that employing a direct style of communication is beneficial to inform viewers of the relevant characteristics of the product succinctly and accuracy.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has provided valuable insights into the influence of semiotics consumers have on brand perceptions and loyalty through SFV content, there are several areas of future research that could build upon its limitations and extend contemporary understanding in this field.

While this study focuses on the immediate impact of SFV content on consumer perceptions and loyalty, future research could explore the long-term effects. Investigating how consumer perceptions evolve over time after exposure to SFV content, and whether initial perceptions translate into sustained loyalty, and provide deeper understanding of the lasting impact of semiotic cues in digital marketing. Additionally, this study primarily examined the influence of SFV content on consumer perceptions within a specific product industry. Future research could conduct studies to explore how semiotics cues vary across other industries, helping marketers tailor their strategies to diverse audiences more effectively. This study identified emotional resonance, identity and relevant knowledge as a key factor which influenced the effectiveness of semiotic cues, however, future research could employ more resilient method for measuring said responses. Utilising techniques such as facial expression analysis or neuroimaging could provide deeper insights into the emotional impact of SFV content on consumer perceptions and loyalty towards brands. Future research could also explore the integration of semiotics with emerging technologies, such as AR or VR, in SFV content. Investigating the potential for semiotic cues to create immersive brand narratives in virtual environments could inform integrated marketing strategies that optimize consumer touchpoints, represent an innovative frontier in digital marketing research, and offer insights into emerging trends and strategies.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide:

Social Media

1.1 Can you describe your social media habits? (e.g. which apps, how much time)

1.2 How often do you see, or search cosmetics content on social media? (e.g. skin care, make up, perfume etc...)

Short-Format Videos (SFV)

2.1 How do you feel about short-format videos on social media?

2.2 What aspects of short-format videos make you more likely to engage with them (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing, saving)?

2.3 How do you feel about User-Generated Content (UGC) versus brand's own content (e.g. campaign ads, sponsored ads, spokesperson endorsement)?

2.5 In your opinion, do you think SFVs on social media affect industry trends and consumer preferences?

Perfumes

3.1 How frequently do you use perfume, and how often do you purchase perfumes?

3.2 What is your relationship with the perfumes you have had, and the ones you're using now?

Perfumery Communication

4.1 What do you think about brand's perfume video advertisements?

4.2 What type of SFV perfume content is most appealing, informative, or entertaining to you on social media?

4.3 How do you think User Generated Content versus the brand's own content about perfumes differ?

4.4 Do you think SFV perfumery content differs from other product content on social media?

4.5 Have you ever been influenced to purchase, or test a perfume, because of SFV's on social media?

Brand Perception & Loyalty

5.1 How do celebrities featured in brands' SFV advertisements shape your perception of a perfume?

5.2 Do user generated SFVs influence your perception of perfume brands, could you give an example?

5.3 Are there specific influencers or content creators whose content you trust more than others when it comes to perfumes?

5.4 Can you describe your relationship with your signature perfume?

5.5 Have short-format videos on social media impacted your relationship with a particular perfume or perfume brand?

5.6 Do you trust UGC or brand's own content about perfumes more?

Semiotics

6.1 What do you think of the aesthetics: visual imagery, text, and music of brand's perfume SFV advertisements on social media?

6.2 How do you think brands communicate the perfume's scent in their advertisements?

6.3 What role do the packaging, label, and perfume bottle play in your perception of the product, and brand?

6.1 In your opinion, what could perfume brands do to improve their short-format videos?

6.3 Do you have any additional thoughts or insights on the influence of short-format videos on your behavior, or attitudes in relation to perfume?

Appendix B

Initial codebook

Top-level codes / Theme	Code description
Gratification Niches	A specific area/aspect within media consumption where individuals derive satisfaction. How social media apps gains attention from users (Scherr & Wang, 2023).
Second-level code / Category	Code description
Trendiness Gratification Niche	Usage relating to coolness, newness, and exciting excitedness (Scherr & Wang, 2023). Connecting it to virality, popularity, and trends.
Novelty Gratification Niche	New and innovative character (Scherr & Wang, 2023). Connecting it to interesting, entertaining, and relevancy.

Appendix C

Modified codebook

Top-level code / Theme	Code description
Gratification Niches	A specific area/aspect within media consumption where individuals derive satisfaction.
Brand Relationship Quality Construct	Maintaining a relationship involves more than just positive feelings; it requires resilience and endurance over time (Fournier, 1998).
Semiotics	Linguistic elements, stylistic features and techniques, and design elements (Chandler, 2022, p.67).
Second-level code / Category	Code description
Trendiness Gratification Niche	Usage relating to coolness, newness, and exciting excitedness (Scherr & Wang, 2023).
Novelty Gratification Niche	Usage related to new and innovative character (Scherr & Wang, 2023).
Information-Seeking Gratification Niche	Seeking information, educational motivations, and informational content.
Love and Passion BRQ Construct	Emotional attachments, emotional investments, love, and feeling a sense of not being whole without it (Fournier, 1998).
Self-Connection BRQ Construct	A significant aspect of self, identity, uniqueness, and dependency (Fournier, 1998).
Interdependence BRQ Construct	Frequent brand interactions, intense individual interaction events (Fournier, 1998).
Commitment BRQ Construct	Investment-related, loyalty, and continuous usage (Fournier, 1998).

Intimacy BRQ Construct	Advertising cues, personal associations, and experiences (Fournier, 1998).
Brand Partner Quality BRQ Construct	Evaluation of brand's performance and overall relationship satisfaction (Fournier, 1998).
Visual Semiotics	Environment, colours, actions, and actors.
Sound Semiotics	Music, speech, and effects.
Text Semiotics	Captions and text on screen.